

A Théorie Communiste Reader

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A THÉORIE COMMUNISTE READER

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Introduction to TC

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THIS TEXT, AN INTRODUCTION TO TC, WAS WRITTEN FOR A GROUP OF 'YOUNG LYONNAIS' CARRYING OUT A 'THEORETICAL REFLECTION ON THE GERMAN AND ITALIAN LEFTS' AND WAS PUBLISHED IN TC 14.

The fundamental problem to which all theoretical production must return, that must be confronted and to which it must find a resolution, is the following: how can the proletariat – acting strictly as a class of the capitalist mode of production, in its contradiction with capital within this mode of production – abolish capital, therefore all classes and therefore itself; that is to say, produce communism?

The genealogy of this question leads us back to the heritage of the 'Lefts' and principally the German-Dutch Left. We could of course go back to Marx, or to Bakunin in his controversy with the latter, and to certain anarchist theoreticians. We will see further on why the so-called Italian Left did not consider the necessity of this question.

The essential problem which TC confronted since its beginning in 1975 (before then we published the review *Intervention Communiste* – of which 2 numbers and several bulletins appeared, and some of us participated in *Les Cahiers du Communisme de Conseils*, edited in Marseille from '68 to '73) is that which, remaining within the perspective of the class, poses the production of communism as the abolition of capital and thus of classes, and the transcendence of all existing categories in which the one and the other define themselves: exchange, value, the State, the existence of classes as particularisation of the community, division of work, property, wage-labour, accumulation, productive forces, existence and therefore management of the economy. Communism is not the workers

management of this mode of production, the conscious taking hold of its contradictions, taking up the development the productive forces where capitalism itself is unable to continue. With no presupposition to be reproduced, communism is not a mode of production; it is not even a society in the sense of a totality encompassing the relations that individuals define among themselves in their singularity. Communism is that which the proletariat finds in itself the capacity to produce, abolishing capital and itself in the process.

If we situate ourselves within the ‘heritage’ of the German-Dutch Left, it is necessary however to explain the dynamic of this inheritance. To align oneself with this ‘heritage’ does not mean repeating this or that invariant position of the KAPD or AAUD, or of theoreticians such as Gorter, Pannekoek or Rühle. Nor does it mean just taking the best from the ensemble of positions; the importance is the theoretical system, the problematic.

The German revolution found its most successful theoretical expression in the production and organisational practice of the Lefts, across the expanding multitude of schisms and regroupments. The Lefts express on one hand the achievement of a long cycle of past struggles (since 1871, and even 1848), and on the other the breakdown of this cycle. Nevertheless, from the content of the class struggle and even in its defeat, from the fashion in which the Lefts explained this content and theorised this defeat, they practically and theoretically opened a new period, a new structuring of the class struggle.

The cycle of struggles that produced the German revolution of 1918-1923 is that of revolution and communism as affirmation of the class. The proletariat sets itself up as the dominant class, inaugurates a period of transition and takes in hand the development of the productive forces and the historical achievements of capitalism in its all its contradictions. This is the ‘society of associated producers’ described by Marx in *Capital*,

the measures of the Communist Manifesto of 1848 or of the Critique of the Gotha Program. The strengthening of the party (of which the notion and even the existence are linked to this structuring of class struggle), union agitation, constitutional and social reforms, parliamentarism, all point to this ‘apotheosis’ of the proletariat as the new ruling class; and the premises of the revolution, and the revolution itself, are read in the light of this empowerment of the class within the capitalist mode of production. In fact, reformism, within the perspective of revolution as affirmation of the class, is intrinsic to the process of class struggle itself. It is not a matter of error, of deviance from any orthodoxy. That the proletariat poses the revolution as its own affirmation, its road to the ruling class, and the generalisation of its condition to society as a whole; that its empowerment at the interior of the existing mode of production were the royal road of this affirmation; that this may even be confused with the reinforcement of capital itself: this all depends on the way in which the class contradiction structures itself in this historical phase of the capitalist mode of production that we qualify, taking up the periodisation of Marx, as the formal subsumption of labour under capital.

Put simply, in this phase capital is an external constraint from which the proletariat must liberate itself. This is the liberation of work, which could still appear as really different from wage labour, that is to say as the self-representation of wage labour to the degree that it poses itself as able to be liberated. But by the same token, it is the revolution and communism which are impossible, not because for all eternity the revolution is something else but because the affirmation of the class, and the process that it necessitates at the interior of capitalism, when posed practically in the class struggle find in the reproduction of capital their necessity and their existence, and their intrinsic limit in the development of capital itself – the form necessarily taken by the empowerment of the class and its organisation.

In effect, from the moment when the passage to real subsumption has been largely carried through (end of the 19th century), the autonomous affirmation of the class enters into contradiction with its empowerment within capitalism, in that this is more and more the self-movement of the reproduction of capital itself. At the same time this affirmation can only find there its foundation, the definition of its objectives and its *raison d'être*. The general crisis of social democracy – not just German – is the social, political and theoretical manifestation of this dynamic. Revolution as affirmation functions on a mutually determining duality of terms historically developing as an opposition between the autonomous affirmation of the class and its empowerment in the capitalist mode of production. The basic terms of the opposition had until 1871 been able to coexist in the workers movement more or less amicably, but this was no longer the case. The German revolution and therefore the German Left found itself ambushed by this situation: the autonomous affirmation of the proletariat confronted what it was in capital, what it had become; it confronted its own class power as class of the capitalist mode of production. The revolution as affirmation of the class confronts its own negation (the counter revolution is intrinsically linked to it) in that which is its essential determination. One speaks of the ‘tragedy’ of the German revolution and the expression would almost be just if it didn’t imply an internal contradiction of the class (the dual constraint of the tragic hero). The power of the class as class of this capitalist mode of production is in fact that of capital under which this power is always subsumed, for by definition capital really makes it its own, as its movement. In the period of real subsumption of labour under capital, the empowerment of the class, in which labour poses itself as the essence of capital, is confounded with capital’s own development. It can then, from the First World War onwards, propose itself for the position of management of capital; it can become in such a way the acute form of the counter-revolution. In recognizing exchange,

value, the management (the class always exists somewhere in particular for capital), accumulation according to sections, planification, as contents of its affirmation, the affirmation of the class poses as its presupposition the reproduction of capital and, according to its definite historical nature, the real impossibility of the revolution. The Russian revolution was the model of this impossibility, of this process, even if it necessitated certain particular circumstances for the process of affirmation to itself end up as counter-revolution and capitalist development (the definition of the composition of the capitalist class has only a relative interest).

After the First World War (to situate the rupture chronologically) the passage of capital to real subsumption, out of the long depression at the end of the 19th century, is more or less engaged. Real subsumption of labour under capital signifies that the reproduction of labour is conflictually integrated in the cycle of capital (relative surplus-value); it signifies that capital's absorption of living labour is the principal work of the immediate labour process, which becomes, through the development of fixed capital, adequate to the concept of capital; it signifies that exchange at production costs annihilates the specificity of labour as the producer of value at the level of the reproduction of the totality ; it signifies that surplus-value producing labour, in its relative form, is entirely specified as wage-labour. The history of the capitalist mode of production is always essentially the history of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital. The passage to real subsumption took its historical determination from the wave of revolutions after the First World War, and it would continue to bear their 'stigmata' in the form of the particularisation of the working class and confirmation of a working class identity at the interior of its own reproduction (cf. 'Problématiques de la Restructuration', TC 12).

On the one hand the German revolution and its theoretical expression in the German-Dutch Left express the struggle against this integration of the reproduction of the working class in capital's own cycle; it is the

critique in acts of all the mediations of the empowerment of the class at the interior of the capitalist mode of production as the very process of the revolution: syndicalism, mass party, united front, parliamentarism. Certain fractions of the Left even came to criticize all struggles over the wage as distracting from the revolution in so far as they constitute a 'self-recognition of the class' in the system. On the other hand the Left made of communism the revelation of the being of the proletariat as the productive class, the working class, of co-operative work in general. There would no longer be anything to separate the class from that which it immediately contains in itself – communism. The council form is thus the natural form of its activity. But in this case communism is no more than the management of production by the proletariat within the already given categories: property (collective, social, state ...), division of labour, exchange, development of productive forces, existence of an economy as the field of the objectification of social relationships. Manifesting to the hilt its integration, and its definition by capital, the proletariat in its struggle can thus only conflictually reinforce its adversary (capital is precisely the process of this conflict), and recognise its necessity.

The Left only saw the integration taking place in the passage to real subsumption in the mediations of the empowerment of the class, and separated these mediations from the definition of the proletariat as class of the capitalist mode of production. Communism was the revelation, the liberation of an essential being of the class, as it exists in the capitalist mode of production, and as this defines it. The Italian Left never reached a point or rupture as productive of interrogations and supersessions. They remained in a critique of mediations not in themselves, in as much as mediations, but from a formal perspective. They knew the forms of these mediations only as forms and criticized them as such (mass party, united front, anti-fascism). They wanted the mediations (party, union, period of transition, workers state) of the empowerment of the class in the capitalist

mode of production and its affirmation, without the expression of the existence of the class as class of this mode of production (cf. the debates of Bilan on syndicalism and even on the existence of the proletariat).

The deepening of real subsumption could only be fatal to the Lefts. It became more and more evident, not as intellectual discovery, but as practice of the class in the mode of production, that syndicalism, parliamentarism, adhesion to democracy (to the necessary fetish of this society, class alliance), defence of working conditions, party organisation, were not mediations exterior to the being of the class, to that which it is, by definition, in its reciprocal implication with capital. To affirm, in critiquing all these mediations, that the being of the class immediately carries communism within it, could not leave 'intact' this being in as much as revolutionary nature to be liberated. It became evident in criticizing these mediations and the practices attributed to the 'old workers movement' that one was only 'revealing' and coming up against the adhesion of the proletariat to the capitalist mode of production and its definition within it, all the while persisting in conceiving communism as the revelation and liberation of its being. In remaining with the affirmation of this being, one couldn't go beyond a vision of the revolution as the liberation of the class, while at the same time, through a critique of mediations, all possible expression of this affirmation is forbidden. One conserved, moreover, a perspective in which communism represents the workers management of capital.

Nevertheless, the history of the German-Dutch Left did not simply finish at this impasse, it had, almost despite itself (as revealed by the proper history of its schisms in the 20's and 30's), produced the conditions and the theoretical arms for its overcoming. Its reflection on the 'old workers movement', its analyses of the Russian revolution, and its critiques of workers politics, lead the German-Dutch Left to think that the proletariat makes the revolution, carries communism, in a state of contradiction, in destroying all that which produces his immediate existence in this society

and everything that it expresses. The revolution as affirmation of the being of the class was conserved by critiquing all the existing forms of this being. Always in a perspective of the affirmation of the class, the Left found itself in an impasse, but its critique of the existence of the class was the stepping stone out of it. It sufficed to no longer consider this existence in contradiction with its essence.

What the 'ultra-left' (a term which appeared at the end of the 20's, formalising, after the triumph of the counter-revolution, all the advances of the Lefts in the revolutionary wave) were never able to articulate was that the class was revolutionary in finding in its definition as class of the capitalist mode of production the capacity and the necessity to negate itself as a class in its contradiction with capital. Once this conception was finally reached in the crisis at the end of the sixties it turned out to be its swan song. Those who approached closest to this vision during the first phase of real subsumption and in the face of a strong working class identity, could only abandon the theory of communism as the theory of the proletariat (the group L'Ouvrier Communiste; certain involved with Bilan, The Essen tendency of the KAPD, rediscovering the theories of the 'Jungen' on the individual worker and all those who would give up 'belief in the proletariat'). We had to wait for the sixties for the question to be posed in a new form. This was the principal contribution of the SI, despite its mystifying terms. The definitions of proletariat and spectacle suppose the problem resolved, because in staying at the level of the individual and the commodity one still had alienation but not the reciprocal implication between proletariat and capital. Finally Invariance resolved the problem in throwing the baby out with the bathwater:

The point of arrival has already been indicated: to situate the limits of the theory of the proletariat on the historical plan, that is to say to submit the evidence of how in the process of revolutionary struggles of this century the proletariat has not proposed another society, another mode of life; how

in the last analyses it has only called for a different management of capital. (...) To pose thus the necessity of delimiting what they [the struggles of the 20's] had really been able to produce is also to understand why the movement of our day has not been able to go beyond the practice of its antecedents. It appears that we cannot get out of the impasse without abandoning the theory of the proletariat.

As real subsumption advanced (and this was the real counter-revolution in relation to the period at the beginning of the 20's) it appeared that the mediations of the existence of the class in the capitalist mode of production, far from being exterior to the 'being' of the class which must affirm itself against them, were nothing but this being in movement, in its necessary implication with the other pole of society, capital. The ultra-left arrived simultaneously, on one side at the critique of any relation between the existence of the class in the capitalist mode of production and communism, and from the other side at the affirmation of the equation of communism and the being of the class. The contradiction was provisionally overcome by the delimitation of the integration as the product all the mediations posed between the being of the class and communism. For the Ultra-left it was necessary to combat and suppress all these mediations. The proletariat must negate itself as class of capital (acquire its autonomy) to realise its true nature which would overtake capital: the class of work and its social organisation, of the development of the productive forces. But reality stubbornly showed that its true nature was precisely what permitted these mediations to exist, was in a necessary relationship to these mediations. The Ultra-left suggested to us: 'revolution and communism are not the affirmation of the class as it is in the capitalist mode of production,' but it did not itself manage to extend the consequences of this to that which it considered to be the revolutionary nature of the proletariat, that which it always posed as separate from its 'existence' (The ultra-left functioned on that duality which would take the form: proletariat/working class).

The ultra-left, with all its limits, lead us to the fundamental theoretical point of communism as the negation of the proletariat (which must still be defined). Only after the revolutionary renewal at the end of the 60s and beginning of the 70s were we obliged to take the theoretical lessons of the entire cycle of struggle, begun in the 1920's, and go beyond them. The experience of these years could no longer leave any illusion about the managementist perspective as revolutionary. The Italian left had already made this critique its own, but without at all relating it to the self-negation of the class, unless in a 'clandestine' manner in contrast to its official discourse (cf. Bordiga's doubts brought out by Camatte in *Bordiga et la Passion du Communisme*). The completed cycle of struggle left us two certitudes: the revolution and communism are the abolition of capitalism and to that degree the abolition of all classes including the proletariat (here is communist theory as theory of the revolution); the contradiction between the proletariat and capital is the very process by which the capitalist mode of production reproduces itself, the very process of accumulation as qualitative movement, and that of its restructuring (here is communist theory as theory of counter-revolution). This was to eliminate the possibility of looking for the capacity of the proletariat to produce communism elsewhere than in the strictly capitalist conditions of the contradiction. We found ourselves therefore mercilessly confronted by the question posed at the beginning of this text: 'How can a class, acting strictly as a class, abolish capitalism?'

In the conditions of the early seventies two types of responses to this question were formulated. The first consisted of taking up the contribution of the Lefts without the managementist aspect (*Le Mouvement Communiste* journal and book), or in abandoning it altogether, to be left with nothing but a catalogue of 'revolutionary positions' ('Bail a Céder') of which the 'revolutionaries' were the sole guarantors (LMC.4). This route was pursued later by the journals *La Banquise* and *La Guerre Sociale* , but

with more and more support for a humanist conception of the proletariat, notably present in *La Brise-Glace* and *Mordicus*: the liberation of human activity from work or from class, capital as oppression, the proletariat as the poor. Finally, no longer able to envisage the contradiction between the proletariat and capital as productive of communism, the vision on the whole was that of an opposition between communist and capitalist tendencies. This finished by understanding the movement of society as an opposition between the true human community and the false – democracy (hence the revisionist deviation, cf. TC 13).

The second response consisted of speaking of the self-negation of the proletariat (*Négation, Intervention Communiste, Theorie Communiste n°1, Crise Communiste*). We were still paradoxically in the preceding problematic: we still gave the proletariat a revolutionary nature. This revolutionary nature was an internal contradiction between its complicity in this society and the negation of this society which existed in the proletariat as ‘tendency’ in rupture with this complicity. The self-negation was the resuscitation of the human essence; we were still in teleology and scholasticism: essence, existence, being, tendencies, senses, qualities... We were thus in this problematic always on the brink of abandoning a classist theory to fall into a theory of humanity and/or the individual (*Crise et Communisme, L’unique et son Ombre*).

It was for this reason that we took upon ourselves the task of a theoretical redefinition of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital. We needed first of all to redefine the contradiction such that it simultaneously carried communism as its resolution and described the reproductive dynamic of capital. It was necessary to pose the proletariat’s identity as both class of the capitalist mode of production and revolutionary class, which implied no longer seeing this ‘revolutionary’ quality as something modifying, disappearing, and being reborn with the flow of circumstances and conditions.

This Contradiction is exploitation

1) It defines the existing classes in a strict relation of reciprocal implication.

2) As accumulation it immediately poses the contradiction between classes as history.

3) It defines its terms not as separate poles with determined natures being modified through history, acting in relation to an exterior movement of accumulation posed as the condition of their action, but makes the relation between the terms and its movement the 'essence' of its terms.

4) It is, as the contradiction between the proletariat and capital, the process of the historical signification of the capitalist mode of production; it qualitatively defines the process of accumulation of capital as de-essentialisation of work, as 'contradiction in process'; it defines the accumulation of capital as its obituary (cf. Marx, Grundrisse MEW 42.601).

5) It means that the proletariat is never confirmed in its relationship with capital: exploitation is subsumption. The contradiction between proletariat and capital is the very method by which work exists socially – valorisation. Defined by exploitation, the proletariat is in contradiction with the socially necessary existence of its work as capital, that is to say value become autonomous and only remaining so in valorising itself: the fall of the rate of profit is a contradiction between classes. Exploitation as contradiction de-objectifies the movement of capital.

6) The proletariat is constantly in contradiction with its own definition as class:

- * The necessity of its own reproduction is something it finds in opposition to itself, represented by capital.

- * It never finds its confirmation in the reproduction of the social relation of which it is nevertheless a necessary pole.

- * It is in contradiction not with an automatic movement of reproduction of the capitalist mode of production but with another

class, capital is necessarily the capitalist class. For the proletariat its own existence as class passes by a mediation: the antagonistic class.

7) Not permitting the definition of classes outside their reciprocal implication and the historical flow of their contradiction (The contradiction is precisely this historical flow), exploitation nonetheless specifies place of each of the classes in this implication. It is always the proletariat that is subsumed under capital, and at the end of each cycle capital must reproduce the confrontation with labour; exploitation is effectively realised with the transformation, never accomplished, of surplus value into additional capital (capital as process of its self-presupposition).

With exploitation as contradiction between the classes we understand their particularisation as particularisation of the community, and therefore as being simultaneously their reciprocal implication. This then signifies: the impossibility of the affirmation of the proletariat, the contradiction between the proletariat and capital as history, the critique of all theories of the revolutionary nature of the proletariat as a definitive essence buried or masked by the reproduction of the totality (the self-presupposition of capital). We have historicized the contradiction, and therefore revolution and communism and not just their circumstances. Revolution and communism are produced historically through the cycles of struggle that mark time in the march of the unfolding contradiction.

The last point is essential; the defeat of the cycle of struggle was an historical defeat. We had to not throw out the baby with the bathwater neither try to remake the German revolution in a more radical way (less managementist). Under formal subsumption the revolution and communism were posed as the affirmation of the class; then with the ultra-left after the 20's, the decomposition of this affirmation; notwithstanding that the class struggle of the period was simultaneously dominated by the perspective of pushing the integration of the class to the point of seeking to abolish the contradiction in removing its grounds of existence (social-

democracy, the CPs). It was not because it was managementist that the movement of which the Lefts were an expression failed; it was because it could be nothing else, in so far as the cycle of struggle was that of the affirmation of work. It was not a defeat of the Revolution, but of revolution as it existed historically. It wasn't a question of choosing between diverse positions; it was the entire problematic of revolution as affirmation of the class which had to be overcome. That the theoretical elements could be taken up and used in other problematics didn't affect this imperative.

We had passed from a perspective where the proletariat found in itself faced with Capital its capacity to create communism, to a perspective where that capacity is only acquired as an internal movement of that which it abolishes. This capacity is in this way an historical process; it defines the overcoming of a relation and not the triumph of one of its terms in the form of its generalisation. With exploitation as contradiction we got the identity of the proletariat as class of the capitalist mode of production and as revolutionary class.

Nevertheless, in regard to the second term this could still appear problematic. Certainly exploitation never confirms the proletariat and the process of capital as contradiction between classes had been de-objectified to the degree that the historical process of capital was understood as class struggle and this had a sense of 'contradiction in process' (to the degree that the law of the falling rate of profit was analysed as contradiction between proletariat and capital). Certainly exploitation poses a relation in which the proletariat is defined as negation of all existing conditions (exchange, value, class, division of work, property) on the basis and as the development of these existing conditions (see below). But it was necessary to avoid fossilizing the formula: this contradictory relation is history; it is not the movement of a revolutionary nature encountering different conditions. What then was the structure of the contradiction at work

back at the end of the seventies? The relation between proletariat and capital was in the process of restructuring itself.

The entire previous cycle of struggles (from the post WW1 restructuring to the crisis at the end of the 60's) rested on the one hand on the integration of the conflictual reproduction of the proletariat in the reproductive cycle of capital, in this it was really the process of the decomposition of the revolution as affirmation of the class; and on the other hand on the particularisation of the proletariat inside the self-presupposition of capital, in this it always functioned on the basis of a working class identity directly opposed to capital. Hence the prevalence of working class identity in the decomposition of programmatism . ('Problématiques de la Restructuration' TC 12)

The anterior situation of class struggle, of the workers movement, was based, in this first phase of real subsumption which ended in the 70's, on the contradiction between on the one side the creation and development of an increasingly social and collective work force, and on the other the apparently limited forms of the appropriation by capital of this work force in the immediate process of production, and reproduction. Here is the antagonistic situation which developed as working class identity, which found its immediately recognisable marks and modalities (its confirmation) in the large factory, in the dichotomy of employment and unemployment, work and training, in the submission of the work process to the collection of workers, in the relation between wages, growth and productivity within a specific national arena, in the institutional representations that all this implies, as much in the factory as at the level of the state. The self-presupposition of capital continued, as the concept of capital would imply, but the contradiction between the proletariat and capital was not able to situate itself at this level, in so far as within this auto-presupposition itself there was production and confirmation of a working class identity by which the class struggle, as the workers movement, was structured. This

was the case with all the cycles of struggle which finished in the 70's and it developed at three levels:

a. an affirmation of this identity (communist parties, unions, certain fractions of social-democracy), which contrary to the situation in formal subsumption couldn't develop a revolutionary perspective other than that of an organised capitalism or a leftist keynesianism – hence the perpetual dissatisfaction of leftism corresponding to this level.

b. self-organisation, that is to say rupture with the integration of the reproduction and defence of the proletarian condition within the reproduction of capital. It equally applies to the capacity of the proletariat to relate to itself in its contradictory implication with capital. As ideological militant discourse it implies that an essence of the proletariat as the revolutionary and exploited class (construed by way of the affirmation of its existence in work, socialised production etc.) separated from its existence in its reciprocal implication with capital (which is, however, the real movement of contradiction as exploitation). This existence as a class of the capitalist mode of production thus reduces itself to political and union mediations (this is the approach of the ultra-left).

c. self-negation: result of preceding practice and theorisations, which then confronts them posing itself as their resolution.

It's noteworthy that these three levels ceaselessly reply to and determine each other: the self-negation of the refusal of work against self-organisation, self-organisation against unionism.

The restructuring at work since the middle of the seventies renders the process of the total reproduction of society adequate to the production of relative surplus-value, in so far as it no longer comports any fixed point in the double moulinet of the reproduction of the whole which ceaselessly reproduces and resituates the proletariat and capital face to face:

Capitalist production, therefore, of itself reproduces the separation between labour-power and the means of labour. It thereby reproduces

and perpetuates the condition for exploiting the labourer. It incessantly forces him to sell his labour-power in order to live, and enables the capitalist to purchase labour-power in order that he may enrich himself. It is no longer a mere accident, that capitalist and labourer confront each other in the market as buyer and seller. It is the [Zwickmühle of the] process itself that incessantly hurls back the labourer on to the market as a vendor of his labour-power, and that incessantly converts his own product into a means by which another man can purchase him. In reality, the labourer belongs to capital before he has sold himself to capital. His economic bondage is both brought about and concealed by the periodic sale of himself, by his change of masters, and by the oscillations in the market-price of labour-power. Capitalist production, therefore, under its aspect of a continuous connected process, of a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value; it produces and eternalises the social relationship between capital and wage-labourer.

All the characteristics of the immediate production process (cooperation, production line work, production-maintenance, collective worker, continuity of the production process, outsourcing, segmentation of the work force), all those of reproduction (work, unemployment, formation, welfare), all those which made of the class a determination of the reproduction of capital itself (the wrapping of accumulation in a national sphere, sliding inflation, “sharing of productivity gains”, public service), everything that posed the proletariat as national interlocutor socially and politically, that is founded a working class identity which contested control over the whole society as management and hegemony, all these characteristics are suppressed or overrun. It amounts to all that can pose an obstacle to the double moulinet of the auto-presupposition of capital, to its fluidity. We find on one hand all the separations, defences, specifications that are erected in opposition to the decline in value of the work force, those that prevent the whole working class, globally, in the continuity of its existence,

of its reproduction and expansion, from having to face as such the whole capital: this is the first moulinet, that of the reproduction of labour power.

We find on the other hand all the constraints of circulation, rotation, accumulation, which impede the second moulinet, that of the transformation of the surplus product into surplus and additional capital. Any surplus product must be able to find its market anywhere, any surplus value must be able to find anywhere the possibility of operating as additional capital, that is of being transformed into means of production and labour power, without a formalization of the international cycle (Eastern Bloc, periphery) predetermining this transformation.. The flow of each of the moulinets is affected only in and by that of the other.

Overall, the capitalist restructuring defines itself as the dissolution of all the points of crystallisation of the double moulinet of the auto-presupposition of capital, from all that which constitutes working class identity, to the separation between centre and periphery, the separation of the global cycle into two zones of accumulation and finally the monetary system itself. With the current restructuring, it is both arms of the double moulinet that become adequate to the production of relative surplus value at the same time as the immediate production process, their intersection, confers to each its energy and the necessity of its metamorphosis. It is in this sense that the production of surplus value and the reproduction of the conditions of this production coincide. So much and so well that the contradiction between the classes is situated henceforth at the level of their reproduction as classes. This level of the contradiction implies: the disappearance of all working class identity; that the existence of the proletariat as class is identical to its contradiction with capital; that the proletariat carries no project of social reorganization based on its nature. These are the characteristics of the new cycle of struggles.

For the proletariat, that means that to be in contradiction with capital is to be in contradiction with its own existence as class; there is no internal

contradiction, only confrontation with the other quite real and autonomous term of the relation: capital. During the course of this cycle of struggles, the practice of the class against capital, in the phase to come of the crisis of the reproduction of the totality, contains the capacity to question its own existence as class. It is the same structure of the contradiction that is at work in the course of struggles over the wage and which then finds in the reproduction of capital its specific limit at the same time as its radicalism. In the revolution, in the crisis of reciprocal implication, for the proletariat to produce its class-membership in capital as an outside constraint and a contingency is to go beyond the daily partial struggles on the basis of these struggles themselves and on their own. It is the perspective offered by this cycle of struggles, not as a progressive over-growing but as a produced overcoming (cf. 'Des Luites Actuelles à la Révolution' T.C.13).

To understand the production of communism we must concentrate on the content of this questioning by the proletariat of its own existence as class. The class finds then, in its being against capital, the capacity to communise society, while simultaneously it treats its class nature as exteriorised in capital. The contradiction between the classes has become the 'condition' of its own resolution as the social immediacy of the individual.

The proletariat, defined in exploitation, is the dissolution of the existing conditions in that it is non-capital. It finds there the content of its revolutionary action as communist measures: abolition of property, division of labour, exchange, value.

It's because the proletariat in its contradictory relation to capital is the dissolution of the existing conditions that the contradiction – exploitation – can take this form of class membership as an exterior constraint in capital. This ultimate structure of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital is only these contents of the contradiction (the proletariat as the dissolution of the existing conditions on the basis of the existing conditions) in movement, these contents as form. This structuring of the contradiction

is not the framework in which an unchanging content – a revolutionary nature of the class, a pre-existing definition... – would then manifest itself. It is due to that which is in the heart of this situation of dissolution of the existing conditions in the contradictory relation with capital, that is to say, due to the non-confirmation of the proletariat in the contradiction, due to the fact that none of the elements of its definition are confirmed in this relation, that the contradiction between proletariat and capital – exploitation – can structure itself as estrangement of class membership. This structure of the class struggle is then in itself a content, that is to say a practice. The proletariat reveals itself as the dissolution of the existing conditions as class in the estrangement of class membership, as something to overcome. At the same time it stands out as the presupposition of this overcoming, and furnishes the axis of this overcoming as practice – as communist measures in the revolution.

The proletariat is the dissolution of property on the basis of property. As property, the proletariat finds its own activity confronting it. On the basis of property, the proletariat is the dissolution of the autonomous form of wealth. As the negation of property in its internal relation to property, the proletariat is the necessary presupposition of the overcoming of appropriation as possession, dissolution of objectivity in opposition to activity as subjectivity, overcoming of the contradictory determination of wealth as objectivity and subjectivity.

The proletariat is the dissolution of the division of the labour on the basis of the division of labour. The alienation that this division represents is not just the fact everyone is restricted to a one-sided development, but the fact that this restriction exists only in correlation with the alienation of the social character of human activity. In the capitalist mode of production the division of labour reaches a stage where a class can be its internal dissolution, and as revolutionary activity, the presupposition of its overcoming.

As living labour the proletariat confronts the interdependent chain of social labour objectified in the social capital. Producer of surplus value, the proletariat relates to every capital as an aliquot part of the total capital. The capacity of the proletariat to treat this chain in its entirety is due not only to the fact that as value-producer its work is not itself attached to any particular production, but that the production of value implies the complete development of the division of manufacturing. The extreme division of labour in manufacturing relates to concrete labour, but it exists only because this concrete labour must prove itself as abstract labour, only because of labour's double character. Thus the proletariat's existence as dissolution of the division of labour on the basis of the division of labour, in as much as it is living labour producing value and surplus, allows it to produce communism because it is in a position to address the totality of human activity. In addition the relationship, within the proletariat, between the social and industrial division of labour allows it to address the totality of human activity from the stand point of every particular activity included in this totality. It is thus no longer a question of conceiving human activity as a totality that, through a reorganization of production, globalization or economic planning, would only once more define each part as an accident of the whole (c.f. the division of labour in the Asiatic mode of production or the traditional community). The capacity to produce this immediacy of the general chain of social labour in each concrete activity – and not as a globalisation, or a result of these activities – lies just in this double aspect of divided labour (each aspect determining the other in the capitalist production of value). In fact this means that human activity has no other end than itself and its object, on which it applies itself, and no longer an external finality (capital, value, reproduction of a higher unity etc...).

The proletariat is the dissolution of exchange and value on the basis of exchange and value. In the system of value the negation of value necessarily passes by its form in movement: exchange.

The first aspect by which the proletariat is the negation of exchange on the basis of exchange rested on the exchange of living labour against objectified labour, exchange in which ultimately the capitalist only gave to the worker a part of his previously objectified work. From there, against capital, the proletariat finds in itself the capacity, in abolishing capital, to produce and treat human activity as its own process of renewal apart from any other presupposition.

The second aspect by which the proletariat is the negation of exchange on the basis of exchange rests on the fact that capital is a contradiction in process, in that to validate itself, it must put to work labour promoted to the rank of social labour but only in so far as it confronts its social character as an external object, it is only in this relation that one can qualify it as directly social labour. The characteristics of the accumulation of capital, the universalisation and socialization of labour as antagonism to labour itself, provide the foundation for the proletariat's capacity, in abolishing capital, to produce the situation in which all activity finds its end in itself, in that it is presupposed by the activity of the whole society and concentrates it.

The proletariat is thus the negation of exchange on the basis of exchange, in that exchange is the affirmation of the alienated social character of all activity as external to itself. The process of capitalist production and exploitation can only put to work a socialized labour with a view to the creation of value, this is a contradiction in process which in the capitalist mode of production, takes the concrete existence of incapacity for living labour to valorise the increasing mass of fixed capital where its social character is externally objectified.

The proletariat is, as class, the dissolution of class. To be the dissolution of class is not anything other than the dissolution of the existing conditions, but they are not on the same level. Being the dissolution of class is to be the dissolution of the existing conditions as practice, as class struggle, it is the dissolution of the existing conditions in that as a particular class this dissolution is a subject, a revolutionary practice. The proletariat is never confirmed in its class situation by the reproduction of the social relation of which it is one of the poles. It thus cannot triumph by becoming the absolute pole of society (c.f. the russian revolution above).

Against capital, in the most immediate aspect of its practice, of its life, the proletariat does not want to remain what it is. This isn't an internal contradiction. It really acts as a class: to change itself is to change its conditions. We can see at this level the dissolution of the existing conditions as the action of a subject, as a practice condensing the dissolution of the existing conditions in a class, a class that is the dissolution of class simply because it struggles as such. In its contradiction with capital the proletariat as a class is never in itself positively determined/resolved, it is thus only against capital and not in itself that it is the dissolution of class.

To belong to a class is not in itself an alienation in relation to an isolated individual, a person, as if class membership could pose itself as a choice. To belong to a class, to be a particular individual, is an alienation insofar as it is to necessarily pose the antagonistic class, the separation from the community, as the definition of communal being.

To analyze the proletariat as the dissolution of class through a particular class is only a way to understand how by abolishing capital, the proletariat finds in itself, in this contradiction, the capacity to produce communism as the development of humanity considering nothing of that which has been produced as a limit: self-production of humanity posing no social relation as presupposition to be reproduced, self-production as constant lack, passion, destruction and creation, unceasingly posing the future as

premise. In the same way that one had in the proletariat, as particular class that is the dissolution of class, the synthesis of all other dissolutions which the proletariat represents (property, exchange, value, division of the labour), in its abolition as class, produced in the revolution, one finds the positive content of the overcoming of all alienations, which constitutes in all its diversity the contents of the communist measures taken by the proletariat during the revolution.

The social immediacy of the individual basically means the abolition of the division of society into classes, the scission by which the community becomes foreign to the individual. We can then positively approach what we consider to be the nature of immediately social individuals, or rather the nature of the relations of immediately social individuals in their singularity (at this point the term “social” itself is ambiguous, perhaps it’s no longer necessary). Their self-production in their reciprocal relations never implies a reproduction in a state which would be a particularization of the community, something inherently implied by the division of labour, property, and classes. The immediately social individuals consciously treat every object as human activity and dissolve objectivity in a flow of activities (overcoming of the proletariat as dissolution of property on the basis of property); they treat their own activity as concrete particularization of human activity (ditto for the division of the labour); they consider practically their production and their product, in their coincidence, as being their own end in itself and including their determinations, their possibilities of execution and their finalities (ditto for exchange and value); and finally they pose society as something to be constantly produced in the relationship between individuals, and each relation as premise of its transformation (ditto for class).

The overcoming of the existing conditions is the overcoming of the objectification of production. Thus communism is the overcoming of all past history; it isn’t a new mode of production and cannot pose the

question of the management of this one. It's a total rupture with the concepts of economy, of productive forces and objectified measurement of production. Man is an objective being (supplemented by external objects which he makes his own); throughout his history the non-coincidence between individual activity and social activity (which is the dominant theme of this history, unnecessary to prove or abstractly demonstrate) took the form in this objective being of a separation (objectification) from the productive act and production, which becomes the social character of his individual activity. Separation, alienation, objectification, over the history of the separation of activity from its conditions, constituted these conditions as economy, as relations of production, as mode of production. Being the dissolution of the existing conditions of the capitalist mode of production as class, the proletariat, without making out that all history had only this situation as its end, is in its contradiction with capital the presupposition of the overcoming of all history.

How can a class acting strictly as a class abolish all classes? The history of the capitalist mode of production as contradiction between the proletariat and capital gives us the resolution of this enigma. But let's not be hasty, just because the way has been marked does not mean the goal has been reached; it is in the struggles themselves within the current cycle of class struggle that the enigma must be solved.

Self-organisation is the first act of the revolution; it then becomes an obstacle which the revolution has to overcome

5 SEPTEMBER 2005

ROLAND SIMON, FROM REVUE INTERNATIONALE POUR LA COMMUNISATION

Autonomy, as a revolutionary perspective realising itself through self-organisation, is paradoxically inseparable from a stable working class, easily discernable at the very surface of the reproduction of capital, comfortable within its limits and its definition by this reproduction and recognised within it as a legitimate interlocutor. Autonomy is the practice, the theory and the revolutionary project of the epoch of “fordism”. Its subject is the worker and it supposes that the communist revolution is his liberation, i.e. the liberation of productive labour. It supposes that struggles over immediate demands¹ are stepping stones to the revolution, and that capital reproduces and confirms a workers’ identity within the relation of exploitation. All this has lost any foundation.

In fact it is just the opposite: in each of its struggles, the proletariat sees how its existence as a class is objectified in the reproduction of capital as something foreign to it and which in its struggle it can be led to put into question. In the activity of the proletariat, being a class becomes an exterior constraint objectified in capital. Being a class becomes the obstacle

1 Translator’s note: Les luttes revendicatives, which we have rendered throughout as “struggles over immediate demands”, could mean depending on context struggles over wages and conditions, or for the defence of jobs, or other “everyday” struggles of the proletariat.

which its struggle as a class has to overcome; this obstacle possesses a reality which is clear and easily identifiable, it is self-organisation and autonomy.

THE BITTER VICTORY OF AUTONOMY

SELF-ORGANISATION EVERYWHERE, REVOLUTION
NOWHERE

We can only speak of autonomy if the working class is capable of relating to itself against capital and finding in this relationship to itself the basis of and the capacity for its affirmation as dominant class. Autonomy supposes that the definition of the working class is not a relation but is inherent to it. It was a question of the formalisation of what we are in present society as basis for the new society, which is to be constructed as the liberation of what we are.

From the end of the first world war up to the beginning of the 1970s, autonomy and self-organisation weren't simply the wildcat strike and a more or less conflicting relationship with the unions. Autonomy was the project of a revolutionary process extending from self-organisation to the affirmation of the proletariat as the dominant class of society, through the liberation and affirmation of labour as the organisation of society. In freeing up the "true situation" of the working class from its integration in the capitalist mode of production, an integration represented by all the political and union institutions, autonomy was the revolution under way, the potential revolution. If this was explicitly the agenda of the Ultra-Left, it wasn't only an ideology. Self-organisation, union power and the workers' movement belonged to the same world of revolution as affirmation of the class. The affirmation of the truly revolutionary being which manifested itself in autonomy couldn't have had the slightest hint of reality if it hadn't been the good, unalienated side of the same reality which resided in a powerful workers' movement "constraining" the class. The workers' movement was itself also the guarantee of the independence of the class

which was ready to reorganise the world in its own image; it was sufficient to reveal the true nature of this power to itself, by de-bureaucratising it, disalienating it. It was not a rare occurrence that workers passed from the necessarily ephemeral constitution of autonomous organisations of struggle to the parallel universe of triumphant Stalinism or, in northern Europe, to the bosom of powerful unions. Autonomy and workers' movement nourished and comforted each other mutually. The Stalinist leader was perhaps the "workers' equivalent of the boss by divine right", but he was also the institutional counterpart of autonomy. Self-organisation as a revolutionary theory made sense in exactly the same conditions as those which gave structure to the "old workers' movement". Self-organisation is the self-organised struggle with its necessary extension the self-organisation of the producers; in a word, liberated labour; in another word, value.

A little step backwards. Already in the Italy of 1969, the sectors of workers in struggle are incapable of creating an "assembly" connecting up the diverse forms of self-organisation and the movement is "recuperated" by the CGIL and its workshop committees. Still in Italy, in the self-convened movements of February-March 1984 on the production line, self-organisation is seen to be defensive, in the sense that it expresses the defence of an old composition and an old relation of the working class to capital, a relation which restructuring is in the process of abolishing. For the same reasons, in Spain the assemblies movement (1976, '77, '78) creates or revitalises union structures; likewise the Dutch "hot autumn" of 1983. This is equally the epoch in which all sorts of "autonomous unions" are formed. It is fundamentally a historical type of working class whose existence is put into question by the restructuring. At Renault, during the strikes of 1975, it is the factory of Le Mans, where labour power is the most stable and the rate of unionisation, at 40% is double the national average for Renault, that the strike is the hardest and sometimes has the air of an "autonomous struggle". At the beginning of the 1980s,

when this process of streamlining “is completed” essentially by hitting the unskilled immigrant workforce, provoking an enormous wave of strikes in the car industry, the violence of the struggles is never formalised in attempts to set up autonomous organs. “They want to kill us, but we’re already dead”, such is the spirit of the struggles. If in 1983-84, it is equally difficult to qualify the miners’ strike in Britain as an “autonomous, self-organised struggle”, it is because it was in fact a strike without demands, without a programme, without perspectives. What it meant to be a class was now only defined in and through the adversary of that class, in the action against it. The decline and lost meaning of autonomy are not a simple product of the retreat of class struggles. The “struggle” is not a historical invariant constantly expressing the same class relation. The decline of autonomy is not the decline of the “struggle”, it is the decline of a historical stage of class struggles.

In France, when self-organisation becomes the dominant form of all struggles, starting with co-ordination between the railway-workers in 1986, it no longer represents a rupture with all the mediations by which the class is a class of the mode of production (a rupture liberating the class’ revolutionary nature); self-organisation loses its “revolutionary meaning”: the overgrowth² between the self-organisation of the struggle and workers’

2 Translator’s note: Transcroissance or overgrowth is a term Trotsky used to describe the way he thought the bourgeois revolution in Russia or other less developed areas could grow into the proletarian revolution, an analysis that has not been borne out by experience. *Théorie Communiste* also use it to refer to the more general (and for them equally mistaken) idea that the everyday class struggle, wage struggles and defence of jobs etc. can simply generalise into revolutionary struggle. This conception is for them part and parcel of programmatism (i.e. the programme based on the liberation of labour). Adapted from *Aufheben* no.12, p37 footnote 6.

control of production and society. Self-organisation is nothing other than a radical form of syndicalism. Any struggle over immediate demands of any amplitude or intensity is now self-organised and autonomous; self-organisation and autonomy have become a simple moment of syndicalism (here we mean syndicalism as opposed to the formal existence of trade unions). If the organisms of struggle which the Spanish dockers adopted in the 1980s attempt to guarantee their survival and change form, it is because they were nothing other than organisms for the defence of the proletarian condition. Therein lies the continuity which explains the transition of the one into the other. The theoreticians of autonomy would have it that as such the “autonomous organs” invent communism by remaining what they are: organs of the struggle over immediate demands. As such their natural inclination is permanence and thus their “transformation”.

In all the current discourses on autonomy, it is remarkable to observe that it is the revolution which has disappeared. What was until the beginning of the 1970s the very *raison d'être* of the discourse on autonomy, namely its revolutionary perspective, has become almost unspeakable. The defence and valorisation of autonomy becomes an end in itself and care is taken not to articulate a revolutionary perspective there – the Italian workerists were the last to do that. Now people are content to repeat that the existing autonomy isn't the right one. But now it is the very capacity of the proletariat to find in its relation to capital the basis for constituting itself as an autonomous class and in a powerful workers' movement which has disappeared. Autonomy and self-organisation represented a historical moment of the history of the class struggle and not formal modalities of action. In all the current approaches, autonomy designates any activity where proletarians coordinate directly to do something together, a sort of ahistorical and general form of action on the condition that it is independent of institutions. The historicisation and periodisation of the class struggle vanish. We can only speak of autonomy if the class is capable of relating

to itself against capital and finding in this relation to itself the basis and the capacity for its affirmation as dominant class (which in any case could only produce the counter-revolution which rendered this affirmation impossible).

Currently, anywhere that self-organisation and autonomy triumph, dissatisfaction with them is immediately manifested. Already in France in 1986, the co-ordination between railway workers provoked movements of great defiance, as did the attempt to constitute broader forms of co-ordination beyond the local collectives in 2003. Within the current triumphant self-organisation, it is what opposes it which prefigures the abolition of classes. It is not a question of a dissatisfaction with a “recuperated” autonomy, but with autonomy itself in the sense that it is no longer anything other than “recuperated” by its very nature. This nature, consisting of the liberation of the class following from its autonomous affirmation (having “broken” its capitalist social moorings), was the definition of the revolution in the previous cycle; it is now that through which self-organisation and autonomy exist and are consciously experienced as the limit of all current struggles. Everywhere, as soon as self-organisation is established (and currently you can hardly escape it), people are fed up with it; it weighs heavily on the movement. As soon as it is initiated, it “winds us up”, because it reminds us bluntly what we are and what we no longer want to be. It is here, within self-organisation, against it, that the struggle of the proletariat as a class produces its own existence as a class as a limit to be surpassed. Autonomy is only ever the liberation of the worker as worker.

Self-organisation, autonomy, in fact what we are as a class, have become objects of regular critique in the concrete course of struggles. It is a case of grasping the theoretical and practical discrepancy within self-organisation between what self-organisation is now as a necessary form of the class struggle, and the practical and theoretical critique that

is engendered within itself, even as it is put into practice. However we have to take into account as a characteristic of this cycle of struggles the fact that the battle against “bad” self-organisation is waged in the name of “good” self-organisation. Currently, it is only within this battle in the name of “good” self-organisation that the battle against self-organisation itself manifests itself, i.e. only here does the perspective of the revolution appear as something which is no longer of the order of the affirmation of the class and which as a result can no longer be radically of the order of self-organisation or of autonomy.

As long as class confrontation fails to positively initiate the communisation of relations between individuals as class action against capital, self-organisation will remain the only available form of class action. The search for “true” self-organisation is not an “error”, the “error” itself constantly indicates that self-organisation is to be superseded, by constantly taking as its target really existing self-organisation. This critique of really existing self-organisation in the name of an ideal self-organisation, in which it constitutes a process without end, creates a tension within self-organisation; it indicates the content of that which is to be superseded: the impasse of self-organisation, i.e. of its content, the affirmation, the revelation to itself of the proletariat.

The supersession of really existing self-organisation will not be accomplished by the production of the “true”, the “right”, the “good” self-organisation, it will be achieved against really existing self-organisation, but within it, from it.

In the current struggles, the proletariat recognises capital as its *raison d'être*, its existence against itself, as the only necessity of its own existence. In its struggles, the proletariat adopts all the necessary forms of organisation for its action. But when the proletariat adopts the necessary forms of organisation for its immediate goals (its abolition will equally be an immediate goal), it does not exist for itself as autonomous class.

Self-organisation and autonomy were only possible on the basis of the constitution of a workers' identity, a constitution which has been swept away by the restructuring. What is left now for these proletarians to self-organise?

If autonomy disappears as a perspective, it is because the revolution can no longer have any other content than the communisation of society, which means for the proletariat its own abolition. With such a content, it becomes inappropriate to talk of autonomy and it is unlikely that such a programme would entail what is commonly understood as "autonomous organisation". The proletariat can only be revolutionary by recognising itself as a class, and it recognises itself as such in every conflict and even more so in a context where its existence as a class is the situation that it has to confront in the reproduction of capital. We should not mistake the content of this "recognition". To recognise itself as a class won't be a "return to itself" but a total extroversion through its self-recognition as a category of the capitalist mode of production. What we are as a class is immediately nothing other than our relation to capital. This "recognition" will in fact be a practical knowledge, in the conflict, not of the class for itself, but of capital.

ON SELF-ORGANISATION IN THE CURRENT STRUGGLES

"The English system of shop-stewards which was born in the course of the First World War engendered a specific organisation of the factory, which was given the name of mutualism, in which the content of work-tasks and the rhythm of work were fixed by managers in agreement with the workers concerned through the intermediary of these elected delegates. This system was swept away by all the restructuring, even before the era of Thatcherism. In the course of the 1970s, numerous conflicts arose around this power of the shop-floor delegates; the swan-song of this system was on the one hand the proposals to transform production by the shop-

stewards' committees, notably in the weapons factories, and on the other it was the restarting of production by the workers when firms closed. All this combined to produce a movement around the notions of workers' control and self-management, a British flavoured self-managementism which surpassed in terms of practice and ideas any French developments along these lines. Today, after the decimation of British industry, this current no longer represents anything at all." (Échanges, no.99, p23)

"A complex autonomous movement developed over more than 30 years, a kind of hybrid which combined the system of elected shop-floor delegates (the shop-stewards) and the utilisation of base union structures (often reinforced by widespread use of the "closed shop", i.e. enforced unionisation in a firm – in other words the management by the unions of the hiring of employees. A development of "wildcat strikes" was seen which on repeated occasions threatened governments which had decided to "impose themselves by force". (...) The crisis which was brewing in this situation culminated in the Winter of 1978-79 – the Winter of discontent – in the course of which the country was plunged into a total chaos with no other perspective than the immobilism of this bloc of resistance".

The Thatcher government swept all that away through the destruction of the industrial apparatus, privatisation, globalisation, increasing the orientation towards finance of the economy, the generalisation of flexibility, workers' precariousness and massive unemployment.

"The balance of forces underlying the autonomous movement was undermined; but it could only be (provisionally) overturned after fierce disputes in the key areas of workers' autonomy: the docks, the steelworks, the car factories, the printers and above all the mines." (Échanges, no.107, Oct-Nov 2003)

Returning to the current period to draw out the lessons from the strike of the British postal workers, the text concludes: "The foundations of the struggle, if they mark a break by workers on the shop-floor from the union

leadership, also demonstrate the persistence of certain notions in labour relations and in the utilisation of base union structures, the very notions which the “bringing to heel” of the autonomy of struggles at the beginning of the 1980s had attempted to eradicate, but which are resurgent. (...) All the same, we have to consider that the Royal Mail is practically one of the only national industries in the UK which has not been dismantled, for various reasons, including the intervention of class struggle (it is one of the principal British employers, with 160,000 workers, whose numbers give them an obvious power). Also the shop-floor practices in labour relations, which were common previously in industry but eliminated in the 1980s, are alive and well here” (my emphasis). We could not be any clearer than this.

Currently, in numerous disputes like that of the longshoremen of the West coast of the US, the bosses are attempting to break the unions for the same reasons that they break workers’ autonomy when it manifests itself, because both of them belong to the same epoch, the same logic of capitalist reproduction. This is a point which should exercise the minds of the advocates of the now secular ideology of workers’ self-organisation. In our times, in the post office in Britain or the ports of the West coast of the US, the autonomous struggle of workers becomes indistinguishable in its content to the defence of the large union institutions, not for reasons of the temporary utilisation of unions by workers, but for what they are: large institutions regulating the autonomy of labour-power.

On the evening of Friday July 18th, a wildcat strike breaks out at the Heathrow airport against flexibility and the annualisation of work-time. After three days’ strike by ticket staff and baggage-handlers, they return to work with the announcement of the opening of talks between the unions and management.

Similarly, in Spain, during the shipbuilders’ strike in Jan-Feb 2004, it is the renewal of the collective bargain and increased flexibility which

is at stake. On the 30th of January, the union demonstration ends up with barricades, cars set on fire, the police use rubber bullets. On the 5th February, in Puerto Real, “a base organisation attempts to co-ordinate the struggle if necessary” (*Échanges*, no.109, p23); on the 12th, after renewed battles, a general assembly of the workers decides to hold another demonstration in town which causes further trouble; on the 13th talks between unions and management resume. As usual, the wildcat strike, even when accompanied by the formation of autonomous organisations, is merely a substitute for or an accompaniment to union action. It has become impossible to expect anything else from it, or to hope for an internal dynamic which would constitute its supersession from its own basis and not against itself.

On the 2nd June 2003, the IG Metall union calls for a strike in the metal-workers’ industry in 5 regions of the former GDR. The splits which have appeared between workers in the “West” and workers in the “East” partially explain the failure of the strike. The increasing number of conflicts in different workplaces, the multiplication of sub-contracting and other measures to reduce the costs of production are fragmenting sites of exploitation, with the corollary that global struggles by professional branches of an industry have almost completely disappeared. It is the question of the unity of the proletariat on the basis of struggles over immediate demands which is posed.

Futhermore it has become obvious that the proletariat cannot be united for itself as a revolutionary class by the wage, in the framework of its position as seller of labour-power, everything proves more and more the contrary and this is so obvious that it almost jumps out and hits us round the head.

In Italy, in December 2003, the strike movement of the *autoferrotramvieri* fails to lead to any formal organisation between depots. If the “disease of the wildcat strike hit very hard”, “the union anti-strike mechanism worked

perfectly” (Lettre de Mouvement Communiste). The delegate from the drivers’ co-ordination committee in Brescia, a member of the national co-ordinating committee, is content to say that the illegal strike was “the only weapon available to the workers” and that “if the unions have taken up our demand for 106 euros, it’s because they are listening to the rank-and-file”; he adds that the strike is not aimed against the unions”. Finally the tramdrivers of Milan resume the wildcat strike with the slogan: “we are the union”. The “base unions” played to the full their role as outlet for the anger of the employees, i.e. let’s make no bones about it, the employees fully accepted that they should play this role.

Unfortunately no-one grasped for themselves the offensive political significance of the struggle of the *autoferrotramvieri* nor the permanent task of its organisation at the workplace, right up to the very last of the depots taken over by the movement. The base unions tried without great success to exploit the situation in order to reinforce themselves to the detriment of the large official union confederations, but they refused to facilitate the independent organisation of the struggle.” (ibid). No-one grasped this, not even the workers themselves.

In a flash of lucidity this Lettre concludes: “It is as if defensive struggles no longer functioned as the school of communism, as if they no longer engendered their own political supersession.”

“After the strikes of the railway cleaners, after the strikes in public transport, it is now the turn of the metal-workers. In each case we are dealing with extremely fierce struggles which develop outside and against the unions, properly autonomous struggles” (my emphasis) (*Échanges*, no.109, p19). This is simply wrong. At Melfi, the struggle of the FIAT workers in May 2004 started with strikes called by the unions over the payment of days of down-time due to technical problems; rapidly the workers go beyond this framework and add to these demands the organisation of working time and wages (these additions were accepted by the unions).

The strike was controlled from top to bottom by the FIOM (union of the CGIL), including the blockading of the factory; the workers delegated the attempts to extend the struggle to the other FIAT sites and also the conduct of negotiations. When an agreement (“not a bad one” according to the estimation of *Échanges* no.109) is reached, the attempt to contest this agreement by Cobas³ fails. The workers didn’t constitute a single autonomous organisation, a fact which doesn’t prevent the ideologues of self-organisation to conclude, for this struggle as well as for that of the *autoferrotramvieri*: “with the struggle of the workers of Melfi, workers’ autonomy has gone on to a new stage in Italy”. Autonomy is only deployed and only goes on to a new stage in the heads of militants who have remained fixated by their dream of *Mirafiori*: a factory “fallen into the hands of the workers”. What would they have done with it?

Pathetic depths are plumbed by the conclusion of the *Échanges* text on the Melfi strike. This conclusion reports the declaration of Roberto Maroni, Italian Minister of Social Affairs, in an interview published in *Corriere della Sera*. The minister states: “When the unions agree in talks with the government to get the blockades lifted (he is referring to Melfi, but also to the strikes at *Alitalia* and in public transport, as noted by *Échanges*) and don’t manage to do this, a problem of representation is posed. The current system is in danger of not being capable of managing disputes.” *Échanges* comment: “he added that the moment had arrived to involve the autonomous organisations in the accords as well, because they are more present and active among the workers. Maroni’s speech is interesting not because of what he proposes, but because he demonstrates that radical and autonomous forms of struggle are constantly being thrown up and are beginning to pose a problem in certain strata of the government and the state.” The struggles of the workers pose a problem for sure, but Maroni’s speech is evidently interesting above all for what he

3 Translator’s note: Cobas is an Italian base union.

proposes; not only is it interesting, but it is also true. Maroni recognises something that should gladden the heart of any militant of autonomy: the autonomous forms of struggle adopted by the workers are representative. This is “recuperation”, “manipulation” the ideologues will say, but no. Maroni is much more lucid: the syndicalism of struggles over immediate demands is mediated by autonomous organisations; “let’s recognise these organisations as interlocutors” says the minister.

The capacity for struggle which Italian workers seem to be demonstrating these days opens up vast perspectives for the future when, constrained by the situation and the course of struggles, Italian workers and those elsewhere will confront their situation of being workers which autonomy formalises today as the advanced form of syndicalism. Already autonomy, as it has really manifested itself at Melfi, has revealed itself to be incapable by its very nature of expressing the revolt against work which is so present in the struggle of these workers. It is now within self-organisation and autonomy, against them, that the dynamic of this cycle of struggles is produced as a divergence within the class struggle in general and self-organisation in particular, i.e. as a divergence within action taken as a class.

The self-organisation of struggles is a crucial moment of the revolutionary supersession of struggles over immediate demands. To carry on the struggle over immediate demands intransigently and to the very end cannot be achieved by unions, but by self-organisation and workers’ autonomy. To carry on the struggle over immediate demands through workers’ autonomy on the basis of irreconcilable interests is to effect a change of level in the social reality of the capitalist mode of production. The struggle over immediate demands is no longer situated at the level of profit and all the elements of the process of production which combine to produce it, but at the level of labour as productive of value, of which surplus-value is a part.

In the struggle over immediate demands, self-organisation formalises the irreconcilability of interests between the working class and the capitalist class, and it constitutes in this way the necessary moment of the appearance of class belonging as an exterior constraint; self-organisation is also the form in which the communisation of relations between individuals will get under way, against it.

STRUGGLES OVER IMMEDIATE DEMANDS/REVOLUTION

A RUPTURE

If self-organisation, as a revolutionary process, has become obsolete, it is because the relation between struggles over immediate demands and revolution has become problematic. Self-organisation was the most radical form of relation between them as long as this relation was understood as an overgrowth. Then, Pannekoek could tell us that after a long historical period of struggles, the working-class was becoming the dominant power in a society based on councils, Negri that capital's history was equivalent to the history of workers' activity and Georges Marchais was writing a common program for the Left. All of them are dead now.

A revolutionary struggle emerges from a conflict of immediate interests between proletarians and capitalists and from the fact that these interests are irreconcilable. It is, so to speak, anchored in these conflicts, but if at a moment of the struggle over immediate demands, the proletarians, compelled by their conflict with the capitalist class, don't lift the anchor, their struggle will stay a struggle over immediate demands and will, as such, lead to victory or unfortunately most of the time to defeat.

On the contrary, if they fight against market relations, seize goods and the means of production while integrating into communal production those that wage-labour can't integrate, make everything free, get rid of the factory framework as the origin of products, go beyond the division of labour, abolish all autonomous spheres (and in the first place the

economy), dissolve their autonomy to integrate in non-market relations all the impoverished and even a large part of the middle class, reduced to poverty by their movement; in this case, it is precisely their own previous existence and association as a class that they go beyond as well as (this is then a detail) their economic demands. The only way to fight against exchange and the dictatorship of value is by undertaking communisation.

To defend the proletariat's sacrosanct autonomy is to retreat into the categories of the capitalist mode of production; it is to prevent oneself from thinking that the content of the communist revolution is the abolition of the proletariat, not thanks to a simple logical equivalence (which would say that the abolition of capitalist relations is, by definition, the abolition of the proletariat) but thanks to precise revolutionary practices. The proletariat abolishes value, exchange and all market relations in the war that sets it against capital, and this is its decisive weapon.

It integrates by some measures of communization the largest part of the impoverished, of those previously excluded, of the middle-classes and of the peasantry of the Third World (on this issue too it would be important to reflect on the example of the struggles in Argentina, not to defend interclassism but rather the abolition of classes).

The ever untarnished "autonomy of struggles" as a faculty for transition from a struggle over immediate demands to a revolutionary struggle is a construction that is not interested in the context of this transition. It remains a formal approach to class struggles. If the content of this transition is put aside, it is because autonomy prevents us from understanding this transition as a rupture, a qualitative leap. The "transition" is only an affirmation and a revelation of the true nature of what exists. The proletariat self-organizes, it breaks with its previous situation, but if this rupture is only its "liberation", the reorganization of what it is, of its activity, without capital, rather than the destruction of its previous

situation, that is to say if it remains self-organized, if it doesn't go beyond this stage, it will automatically be defeated.

To assume that any struggle about wages contains a revolt against wage-labour is to assume that these two elements exist one inside the other rather than that the second term is a contradictory supersession of the first. Such a view can now, in practice, only lead to radical democratism. Fifty years ago, it was possible to understand things that way and this conception led to the power of the Councils or to "Real Socialism". The "citizens' movement", alternative globalization, or, more accurately, radical democratism represent without doubt the project of completion of the struggles over immediate demands, and, as such, they can't have any other projects now.

In the radical democratic perspective the evolution of labour time ought to bring emancipation in leisure time; benefits for all ought to become a progressive transition to an activity beneficial to the individual and to society, that is to say the abolition of exploitation within wage-labour; wage demands would become the sharing of wealth; the critique of globalisation and finance would become more important than the critique of that which has been globalised (capital); liberalism and globalisation would be the cause of exploitation. Anybody involved in recent struggles or keeping a close eye on them knows very well that this language has become theirs, and not only in the "public services".

Nobody would deny that the revolutionary struggle originates within a struggle over immediate demands or even that it is produced by it. The question is the nature of the transition. The only "deeply anticapitalist" content confronting the capitalist logic that a struggle could have consists in targeting the capitalist relations of production (that is to say, for the proletariat, targeting its own existence), the reproduction of exploitation and of classes. A struggle over immediate demands that targets this is not a struggle over immediate demands any more, or only if the takeover of

the proletariat on society, the proletariat as the dominant class, is what we mean by revolutionary struggle.

THE QUESTION OF CLASS UNITY.

The proletariat has not disappeared, nor has it become a pure negativity. However, exploitation doesn't produce a homogeneous social entity of the working class any more, a prevailing entity, with a key role, able to be conscious of itself as a social subject, in the sense habitually given to this, that is to say able to have a consciousness of itself as a relation to itself, facing capital.

Integrated in another totality, having lost its centrality as a principle organizing the totality of the labour process, the big factory which gathered a large number of workers together has not disappeared, but it is not the principle organizing the labour process and the valorisation process any more, as they are now a lot more diffuse. It has become a part in an organizing principle that it doesn't grasp. In the contradiction between proletariat and capital, there isn't anything sociologically given a priori (as was the "mass-worker" of the big factory) any more.

The diffuse, segmented, fragmented, corporate characteristic of conflicts is the necessary lot of a contradiction between classes situated at the level of the reproduction of capital. But it is because these conflicts are not a sum of juxtaposed elements but rather a diffusion produced from a historical modality of the contradiction between proletariat and capital, that a specific conflict, because of its characteristics, because of the period and the conditions in which it takes place, is able to polarize the totality of the antagonism that until then seemed irremediably diverse and diffuse.

To unite, workers must break the relation by which capital "brings them together". One of the most common signs that their struggles are going beyond the framework of a struggle over immediate demands and that workers are beginning to unite for themselves (that is to say begin to

target their own condition) is the fact that they subvert and détourn the productive, urban, geographical and social frameworks of their “unity” for capital, as in 1982 and 1984 in La Pointe du Givet (in the French Ardennes) or, more recently, in Argentina.

One can’t simultaneously want the unity of the proletariat and the communist revolution, i.e. this unity as a condition or precondition for revolution. There won’t be any unity other than in communisation and it is only communisation, by targeting exchange and wage-labour, that can unite the proletariat, i.e. there will only be a unity of the proletariat in the very movement of its abolition. The hagiographers of struggles over immediate demands can only speculate about “unity”, and they can’t specify in any way the concrete form it takes, unless it is the formal unity of politics or of forms of organisation come to smooth over divisions which however remain within the struggle. This unity is always something to be added to the struggle.

Workers forge themselves into the revolutionary class in revolutionising social relations, that is everything that they are in the categories of exchange and wage labour. Within struggles over wages, they don’t see the appearance of ‘power’ or ‘project’, but the impossibility of unifying without attacking their very existence as class within the division of labour and all the divisions of the wage relation and of exchange. That is, without putting class itself into question, without a revolutionary practice. The only unification of the proletariat is the one it realises in abolishing itself, which means that this has to be the unification of humanity. Measures of communisation starting from whatever point of the capitalist world (it will have to be from a multitude of points pretty much simultaneously) will have this effect of rapid communisation or will be crushed.

Under the cover of ideas of self-organisation and autonomy we can say whatever we like, that strikes ‘are revolutionary’, that they are so ‘potentially’, that they have ‘something revolutionary’, that they carry

the ‘seeds’ of revolution, etc. All this has only one function, to fail to recognise the leap, the negation, the rupture and to avoid critiquing wage struggles. This leads to a gradualist and mechanistic conception of the passage of struggles over immediate demands to revolutionary struggles; and to abandoning the understanding that the class is the subject of its communist activity in coming into conflict with its previous situation. Marx, like all revolutionaries, saw a leap, a negation, but the difference with today is that before the permanent association of the class made it possible to envisage an organised continuity between one phase and to the other. Currently, the militants of autonomy seek in the defence of the price of labour power or in other struggles a ‘something’, a ‘seed’, a ‘potentiality’ of revolution. In this attitude of waiting on the dynamic of struggles over immediate demands, the very struggle itself is supposed to engender another. But the ‘struggles’ are only moments of activity of proletarians that they go beyond and negate, not a chain of phenomena that gradually link together – one struggle carrying the seed of another. In short, the link between ‘struggles’, is the subject transforming himself negatively. The link is not ‘evolutionary’.

In the course of struggle, what was once the subject of autonomy transforms itself and casts off its old clothes, so that it can no longer recognise itself as existing other than within the existence of capitalism. It is the exact opposite of autonomy and of self-organisation which, by their very nature, have as their meaning only the liberation of the proletariat, its affirmation and, why not, (for the nostalgic among us), its dictatorship. We can talk of the ‘dynamic’ of struggles only to reach an impasse over the self-transformation of the subject. It is to be blind to the fact that in this ‘dynamic’, what is abolished is the self-organised subject; and that this ‘dynamic’ exists only as abolition of the subject that self-organises. As long as the proletariat self-organises, it can only do it on the basis of what it is within the categories of capital. The point isn’t to

make a normative condemnation of self-organisation, but to state what it is and to say that the revolution is not a dynamic that it contains and which simply needs to blossom.

There is a qualitative leap when the workers unite against their existence as wage labourers, when they integrate the destitute and smash market mechanisms; not when one strike ‘transforms’ itself into a ‘challenge’ to power. The change is a rupture. The question is not the definition of self-organisation or autonomy, we should understand it as a social process; a process of rupture in the class struggle, the self-transformation of a subject that abolishes what defines it. Those who speak unceasingly of the ‘dynamic’ of struggles miss completely what is the essential moment: the proletariat as revolutionary subject abolishes itself as subject of autonomy.

Those who hold to the discourse of the ‘dynamic’ of struggles think that the workers, as they increasingly come into conflict with the state in their struggles over immediate demands, will realise that to win their demands they will have to rise to qualitatively superior forms of struggle. They will have to accede to the political or organisational means adequate to their demands. Once more, we fall into the same distortion: the end is the same, only the means are different. All forms of practice have a goal and use means adequate to reaching this goal. If they change, then the goals change. The end is not exterior to the means, it is its result. We are not concerned with violence, the ‘means’, or the ‘councils’ in themselves. What we ask is: why do the workers confront the state? For the sake of sectional or national ‘interests’? To chuck immigrants out? Against the Americans? Or because the state stands as the defender of market relations, and so of all of the divisions of sector, of nation, of specific demands – against their communist movement?

THE RUPTURE PREFIGURED

From struggles over immediate demands to revolution, there can only be a rupture, a qualitative leap. But this rupture isn't a miracle. Neither is it the realisation by the proletariat that there is nothing left to do but the revolution, after the defeat of everything else. "Revolution is the only solution" is just as inept as talk of the revolutionary 'dynamic' of struggles. This rupture is produced positively by the unfolding of the cycle of struggles which precedes it, and we can say that it still forms a part of it. This rupture is prefigured in the multiplication of gaps within the struggle between on the one hand the proletariat's questioning of its existence as a class in its contradiction with capital, and on the other hand, the reproduction of capital which implies this existence as class. As is empirically verifiable, this gap is the dynamic of this cycle of struggles.

We can point to aspects of the Argentinian social movement which, starting from the defence of a proletarian condition and within this defence, went all the way to putting it into question; or of 'suicidal' struggles; or of the exteriority in relation to the Kabyl struggles of their self-organisation in the aarchs; or of the wild kids' activity in factories; of collectives; of the failure of autonomy; of the unemployed demanding the de-essentialisation of work; of the direct action movement; of the dissatisfaction that self-organisation contains within itself as it exists truly only as it opposes itself to capital in ratifying the existence of the proletariat as a class of the capitalist mode of production; finally, of all the forms of practice within struggles which produce the unity of the class as an exterior unity and an objective constraint.

Two essential points describe the essence of the current cycle of struggles:

The disappearance of a proletarian identity reaffirmed within the reproduction of capital. It is the end of the workers movement and the concomitant failure of self-organisation and of autonomy as a revolutionary perspective.

With the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production, the contradiction between the classes is found at the level of their respective reproduction. In its contradiction with capital, the proletariat puts itself into question.

Struggles display characteristics which were unthinkable thirty years ago. In the strikes of December 95 in France, in the struggles of the *sans-papiers*, of the unemployed, of the Liverpool dockers, of Cellatex, Alstom, Lu, of Marks and Spencers, in the Argentinian movement, in the Algerian rising; the specific characteristic of the struggle appears – in the course of the struggle itself – as a limit in that this very specific characteristic (whether it is the public sector, demands for jobs, defending the means of labour, fighting delocalisation, factory occupations, self-organisation etc.), against which the movement collides often in the tensions and the internal confrontations of its decline – always comes down to the fact of being a class and of remaining so.

Most of the time, the movements are not expressed by ringing declarations or radical action, but by all the practices of ‘flight’, or of denial by proletarians of their own conditions. In the ‘suicidal’ struggles of Cellatex, in the strike at Vilvoorde and many others it is evident that the proletariat is nothing if it is separated from capital and cannot remain this nothing (that the proletariat demands to be reunited with capital does not close the abyss that the struggle opens – the recognition and refusal of the proletariat of itself as that abyss). It is the de-essentialisation of labour which becomes the activity of the proletariat, both in a tragic manner in its struggles without immediate perspectives (suicidal struggles) and in its self-destructive activities, and also in the demands for this de-essentialisation as for example in the struggle of the French unemployed and precarious workers in the Winter of ’98. When it becomes evident (as it did in the Italian transport strikes or of the Fiat plant at Melfi), that autonomy and self-organisation have no perspective, this is the point

at which the dynamic of this cycle of struggles is constituted and the ground is prepared for the process of the supersession of the struggle over immediate demands on its own basis. The proletariat comes face to face with its own definition as a class which becomes autonomous in relation to it, which becomes foreign to it. The practices of self-organisation and their fate are clear examples of this.

The proliferations of collectives and the recurrence of intermittent strikes (like Spring '03 in France, or the English postworkers) make palpable in defining themselves against it, that class unity is an objectification within capital. We shouldn't judge these phenomena with a normative measure, which sees in them only an unaccomplished project of class unification which is the antecedent to its affirmation. In these struggles, it is the exteriorisation of class belonging which is revealed as the present nature of struggle as a class. In all these movements, seeing the segmentation of the class as a weakness to be overcome in a unity, is to ask a formal question and to answer it with a formal question. The spread of these movements, their diversity, their discontinuity is their very dynamic and what is interesting in them. 'Going further' is not to overcome segmentation in unity – that is a formal answer to a problem which is probably obsolete. The point isn't to lose that segmentation, the differences. 'Going further', is, in other circumstances, the contradiction between these struggles in their diversity and the unity of the class objectified within capital. The point isn't to say the more the class is divided the better, but that a generalization of a strike movement is not synonymous with its unity, i.e. with an overcoming of differences which are seen as purely accidental and formal. The point is to understand what is at play in these segmented, diffuse and discontinuous movements: the growth of a discrepancy within this 'substantial' unity objectified within capital. This extreme diversity which is conserved and maybe even deepened in a more widespread movement (in contradiction with capital and this objective unity which it represents),

is perhaps a condition of the articulation of these immediate struggles and communisation. These facts are now an unavoidable determination of the class struggle. The unity of the class can no longer base itself on the basis of the wage and the struggle over immediate demands as a prelude to its revolutionary activity. The unity of the proletariat can only be the activity in which it abolishes itself in abolishing everything that divides it. It is a fraction of the proletariat which in overcoming the demand based nature of its struggle will take communising measures and which will begin the process of the unification of the proletariat which will not be different from the unification of humanity, i.e. its creation as the totality of social relations that individuals establish between themselves in their singularity.

In recent times we have seen how unemployment and precariousness have been placed at the heart of the wage relation; we have seen how the situation of the clandestine worker has been defined as the generalised situation of labour-power; we have seen how the immediacy of the social individual has been posed as the already existing foundation of opposition to capital (as is done by the direct action movement); we have seen how suicidal strikes have broken out as at Cellatex and others in the Spring and Summer of 2000 (Metaleurop – with reservations – Adelshoffen, la Societe Francaise Industrielle de Controle et D'Equipements, Bertrand Faure, Mossley, Bata, Moulinex, Daewoo-Orion, ACT – ex Bull); and we have seen how class unity has been posited as an objectivity constituted within capital. It is the content of each of these particular struggles that produces the dynamic of this cycle within and in the course of these struggles. The revolutionary dynamic of this cycle of struggles appears in most of today's struggles as the tendency for the class to produce its existence as class within capital, and so to put class itself into question (the class no longer has a relation to itself). This dynamic has its intrinsic limit in what defines it as a dynamic – acting as a class. As theorists we are the spies and promoters of this gulf, which is the class putting its own existence

as class into question within the class struggle, and in practice, we are also its actors when we are immediately involved. We exist in this rupture.

I will now develop some of these points in relation to some recent struggles.

COLLECTIVES

The underlying dynamic behind the creation of collectives – which no longer imply self-organisation or autonomy – within each strike of any importance and length is testament to the end of working class identity. These formations are not, as autonomy, a better organisation/existence of the class than those institutionalised representative forms, leaving to them what belongs to them, (leave to the unions what belongs to them), but the creation of a distance towards these forms which has as its content the distance of the class to itself. A distance established against a class unity existing as something objective within the reproduction of capital. Those nostalgic for the Great Class Party and the unity of the battalions of the working class are kidding themselves if they think that the segmentation of the class is merely suffered – more often it is willed, constructed and demanded. The nature of the segmentation and the collectives is the proletariat making extraneous its own definition as a class within the class struggle. How then could a ‘unity’ that isn’t one, that is an inter-activity, be constructed within a wider class movement? I do not know... but the class struggle has often shown its infinite inventiveness. We see as an extremely positive sign that the characteristics of the new cycle of struggles are given to us in the course of ordinary everyday struggles.

ACTIVITIES WHICH PRODUCE THE OBJECTIVISATION OF THE EXISTENCE AND UNITY OF THE CLASS

This class unity, even in the form of the general strike, (in the ‘classical’ conception) has entered the era of doubt. When the strikers of the spring

of 2003 in France called for a general strike, they didn't ask of the unions what they themselves were not doing but would have wanted to do, they demanded something else than they were doing. Here we have a 'spontaneous', 'basic', 'self-organised' movement which sees as a way forward a call for a general strike from the very unions which they distance themselves from on a day to day basis. There is not necessarily a contradiction there (this is after all how things transpired), but it is difficult to present the demand that the unions call a general strike as a simple continuation of the movement. Strangely, this movement doesn't call for the general strike when it is on the rise, but rather when it is in decline, which gives a strange hue to the nature of the general strike. It is the strikers' own action which dominates the strikers, which was not the case fifteen days earlier when it was the continuous thread of activity and opposition through which the class exists in itself as distinction in relation to its unity and its objectified existence in the reproduction of capital. Class unity is still alive and well, it is an objective unity in the reproduction of capital, to appeal to the unions was simply to recognise the level at which this unity exists, as a hypostasised unity.

THE "WILD KIDS"

Here we are talking about the rejection of the entire order of the capitalist system of production by important sections of young workers. This rejection has no time for the seductions or sanctions of integration or for the ideologies of self-management. This situation has nothing in common with what we saw in the 1970s in Europe and America.

The 'collateral victims' of the wild kids are the fables around cooperation tying the workers together, (for themselves), as a stepping stone to revolutionary self organisation and autonomy.

ARGENTINA: A CLASS STRUGGLE AGAINST AUTONOMY.

We can talk about ‘self management of misery’, but then we ignore the main thrust of the problem of the very nature of self-management, self-organisation and autonomy. It is just as easy to say that there is no possibility of self-management within the capitalist system – but generalised self-management having abolished the state and capitalist domination will in the end be nothing more than the management of businesses (of all businesses) and of their connections, their exchanges. It would inevitably lead to the re-establishment of value and of the state. The historic period of autonomous struggles in Argentina – the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s – is over not simply because empirically we don’t encounter similar struggles, but as a result of the transformation of the mode of exploitation, of the composition of the working class, in the modalities of its reproduction. The ‘Rodrigazo’ of 1975, with its area councils, is revealed as the swansong of this period and this era of class struggle. Even during this period, autonomy resulted only in formulating nationalist programmes, economic planning or renewed trade union strength.

At the moment, for the militants of autonomy, what’s important is the denial of actually existing autonomy, because they are stuck in an insurmountable contradiction. On the one hand, autonomy and self-organisation are the route travelled by the revolution in progress, or they constitute the potential revolution. On the other hand, the present expressions of autonomy are in a massive and recurrent way the confirmation of the class as class of the capitalist mode of production. The autonomous Argentinian movements declare – ‘we have done the work of the political parties, the NGOs, the government’. The only perspective, the only dynamic which emerges is the one which is opened up by everything that runs counter to this autonomy. We can be purists of self-management and autonomy if we like, in the end self-organisation are the factories run by the workers themselves and the management of

the planes trabajar by the piqueteros themselves, (even working time is now regulated within the movement). Since the piquetero organisations have won the right to manage these work plans, their allocation has itself become a huge question, that is, not just in relation to the government, but within the movement itself.

We cannot argue that because of the work plans the piqueteros are no longer autonomous and self-organised. If it is important to emphasise the autonomous and self-organised nature of the movements, it is not in order to show that they become degenerate or institutionalised, due to some sclerosis of self-organisation and autonomy; rather they are the clearest manifestation, the simple truth (neither good or bad), of what they are today: a rejection of what we are in society which is nothing but our 'liberation'.

The few cases of occupation with the resumption of production, asking the state to take control of the factory, are the real content of autonomy at the moment (the autonomy of the working class is labour and value). We imagine if we like all the factories taken over, this would change nothing. As long as the workers self-organise as workers (self-organisation is this by definition), the 'factories taken over' will be capitalist factories, never mind who runs them. The essence of what has happened in Argentina, is that all the forms of self-organisation, autonomy, workers' control and assembly immediately encountered their limit in the form of opposition and an internal contradiction treating them like a perpetuation of capitalist society. Abolishing capital is at the same time denying oneself as a worker and not self-organising as such, it's a movement of the abolition of businesses, of factories, of the 'product', of exchange (whatever its form). The proletariat as class and revolutionary subject abolishes itself as such in the abolition of capital. The process of revolution is that of the abolition of what is self-organisable. Self-organisation is the first act of the revolution, what follows is carried out against it.

The content of this challenging of self-organisation within self-organisation is consciously articulated in Argentina around two themes: subjectivity and labour.

At the very heart of self-organised collective projects, the subjectivity and inter-individuality put forward is in opposition to the particularisation of an activity like labour which is the coincidence of the social and individual aspects of human activity outside itself; and is in opposition to the autonomisation of the conditions of production as economy. The capitalist mode of production is a mode of production not because it needs to pass through material production as such, but because its social relations need to pass through a form, a principle, which can only exist objectively – value. Communism is not a mode of production, because activity is not gathered as an exterior common norm that can only exist as production objectifying itself. In communism, relations between individuals are relations in which their singularity constitutes the reality of their relations. It is just as absurd to conceive communism as a form of organisation of production, which inevitably has in the end to be a form of account, a forcibly abstract equalisation of activities which can be quantified, as it would be to conceive it as a purely inter-subjective relation to which production is a mere accessory. In communism, each activity is an end in itself because there is no norm, there is no principle of equalisation or of a situation to reproduce.

The most important aspect of the Argentinian struggles is precisely the one scorned by the apologists of self-organisation. Not as they themselves would have it – the problem of autonomy within productive activity become sclerotic in institutionalisation ‘facilitating the reproduction of an economy in crisis’ (Échanges) – but because it is therein that autonomy truly lies and that it is brought into question. Revolution as communisation becomes credible within the modalities of productive activity because it enters into contradiction with self-organisation in the way in which

its productive activities are implemented and in conflicts in which self-organisation itself becomes the target.

In the productive activities which developed during the social struggles in Argentina, something happened which was at first sight rather disconcerting: autonomy appeared clearly as what it is, the taking over and reproduction of its situation within capital by the working class. The defenders of “revolutionary” autonomy can say that this came about because it didn’t triumph, but this was its real triumph. But, at the very moment when, in productive activities, autonomy appeared for what it was, it was the whole basis of autonomy and self-organisation which was overturned: the proletariat could not find in itself the capacity to create other inter-individual relations (I’m deliberately not talking about social relations), without overturning and negating what it is in this society, that is to say without entering into contradiction with the content of its autonomy. In the way that the productive activities have been carried out, in the effective details of their realisation, it is the determinations of the proletariat as a class of this society which have been effectively shaken: property, exchange, division of labour and, above all, work itself.

“If we create canteens only so the *compañeros* can eat, then we are dickheads. If we believe that producing on a farm is just about digging up beans so that so that the *compañeros* can eat, then we are really complete dickheads... If we don’t know how to leave the farm and everything which the state throws at us, how to be the builders of a new social relation, of new values, of a new subjectivity, let’s not bet on a new 19/20.” (a militant from MTD Allen⁴ – south of Argentina, Macache, p. 27). We want “to engender a new subjectivity, new values” (ibid). Elsewhere in an interview with an activist from MTD Solano, it appears that the aim of all these activities is not just to survive, but the main *raison*

4 Translator’s note: Movimiento de Trabajadores Desempleados – unemployed workers’ movement.

d'être is given as "developing new forms of life in common": division of labour; rotation of tasks; hierarchy; men-women relations; forms of apprenticeship; public/private relations; unskilled/skilled labour; going beyond relations of exchange etc. An important position is for example, in MTD Solano, the refusal (in so far as is possible) to take decisions by voting: "...the idea being to find the answer in which everyone recognises themselves". It is the question of "we" and "I" which is treated in a new way here. Without going so far as to talk about the social immediacy of the individual, in such an approach what is put in place is, beyond any mystical relation between the one and the general, the non-separation between the two which maintains their diversity. "When there is a vote, it gives the sensation of losers and winners, as if there were two groups". Here it is also necessary to insist again on the importance of territorial organisation which calls into question self-organisation as imprisonment in a particular situation (territorial unity is not socially homogenous). The occupied factory is no longer alone, it is part of a totality which includes it. Production, distribution thus pose problems which can no longer be solved in the categories which strictly define the proletarian condition and its reproduction. An activist of the MTD Allen (Macache) told how the question of surplus, of overproduction, of its distribution, was posed in an occupied factory, how for the Brukman workers taking over the factory and making it work again was part of a relation of force which included the liaison with the unemployed piqueteros movement. At that moment, we can say that what is lacking is "generalisation of self-organisation" or autonomy. But if so we do not understand that what is called a "generalisation" is not one, it is a destruction of the class as self-organising subject. This generalisation is a supersession by itself of the subject which previously found in its situation the capacity to self-organise. If we do not understand this "dynamic" as a rupture, we are stuck on the vision of a purely formal movement because its content

eludes us, we are confusing the taking in hand of the conditions of survival and the abolition of the situation that one has been led to take in hand. If the proletariat abolishes itself, it does not self-organise. Calling for the self-organisation of the whole movement, is to be blind to its content.

We self-organise like the unemployed of Mosconi, the workers of Brukman, the inhabitants of the shanty towns..., but when we self-organise, we immediately come up against what it is that we are and which, in struggle, becomes what must be superseded. Self-organisation as a general limit to supersession appears in conflicts between the self-organised sectors. What appears in these conflicts is that workers defend their present situation, remaining in the categories of the capitalist mode of production which define them. Unification is impossible without being precisely the abolition of self-organisation, without the unemployed person, the Zanon worker, the squatter no longer being able to be unemployed, a Zanon worker or a squatter. Whether there is unification, but then there is the abolition of the same which is self-organisable, or whether there is self-organisation but then unification, is a dream which is lost in the conflicts that the diversity of situations implies (cf. oppositions between the “neighbourhood committees” of El Alto and the associations of Santa Cruz in Bolivia concerned with the nationalisation of gas and oil).

In Argentina, self-organisation has not been surpassed, and it can only be surpassed in the final phase of a communizing insurrection. The social struggles in Argentina have announced this supersession. When it becomes manifest that it can no longer have autonomy as its content as a realisable project or a project already in the course of realisation, self-organisation becomes an imprisonment within its own situation which is precisely what the struggle against capital must go beyond. The class struggle remains trapped in the simple expression of the class situation. In the course of the relentless defence of its most immediate interests, the existence of the class becomes an exteriorised constraint within capital. In the defence

of its immediate interests, the proletariat is led to abolish itself because its activity in the “occupied factory” can no longer be imprisoned in the “occupied factory”, nor in the juxtaposition, the coordination, the unity of the “occupied factories”, nor in everything which is self-organisable (cf. in Macache the testimony of a Brukman worker).

This means simply that the proletariat cannot struggle against capital without calling into question the causes which define itself in its involvement with capital. It is that which we can see peeping through the internal contradictions of the productive projects (self-organisation of the class all of whose effective practical details overturn all the terms defining the class) and in the conflicts between the self-organised structures.

ALGERIA: “WHEN THEY TALK TO ME ABOUT AAROUCHS, I HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT SOMETHING FOREIGN TO ME”.

The insurrectional social explosion beginning in the Kabylie region in spring 2001 also illustrates the dissatisfaction that self-organisation gives rise to as soon as it is put in place, not by its temporary shortcomings but by its very nature which confirms the existence of the proletariat defined as a class in the categories of the capitalist mode of production. This dissatisfaction that the insurrectional movement manifests vis-à-vis the forms of self-organisation which it gives itself at a certain point rests on two points: the extension of the movement and the question of demands. In this dissatisfaction and the two points on which it rests, what exists is the gap in the class struggle between the existence of the class as it formalises itself in self-organisation and the way that the continuation and deepening of its contradiction with capital leads to its being called into question. In this continuation and this deepening, in the absence of measures of communisation, the Kabylie insurrection was condemned to a headlong rush without formalisable objectives and/or to return to its

existence recognised for itself, that is to say recognised by and for capital, that is to say finally to negotiation through its forms of self-organisation. The riots did not have a perspective of demands, or such a generality (the end of the hogra) that there could be one. They sometimes turned into confrontations (more or less manipulated by the police during the big Algerian demonstrations of June 2001) between rival gangs of looting demonstrators, which testifies to the impossibility of a class unification outside the revolutionary activity in which it abolishes itself.

The aarchs played two contradictory roles, in one way an expression of the movement, as its form of organisation, its place of debate, its voice; they were also a new emerging form of political representation: a substitute for the parties, a new political representation which confined the revolt. Finally, very rapidly, the aarchs revealed themselves not as a broad space of expression for the population, but as an arena for politicians old and new.

Right from the start the Algerian insurrection of Kabylie, despite or because of its great violence, limited itself to attacking all the institutions of the state, but left intact, because it was not its objective and it did not have the means to attack, all the relations of production, exchange and distribution (despite a few marginal modifications relevant to the solidarity or the mutual aid which marks any period where the habitual social framework is overturned). That insurrection had to self-organise. Its self-organisation was then only the sign that it did not overturn social relations, that it had only a limited aim: the liberation of society from a “corrupt ” and “corrupting ” state (from an unfree state) according to the terms which appeared from the beginning of the insurrection. It is its very limitation which gave birth to the forms of organisation that it gave itself, that is to say forms of self-organisation.

The continuation of attacks against the institutions of the state after June 2001 and the necessity of violence in these attacks are as much a rejection of the self-organised movement of the aarchs as they are attacks on the

Algerian state. It is its own existence as a class that self-organisation formalises as an existence in and for capital and that, in struggle, the proletariat no longer recognises as its own. Its existence as a class is autonomised for it. To parody Marx in *The Class Struggles in France*: it is only by making appear from its own movement a compact, powerful self-organisation, making it into an adversary and fighting it that the party of subversion can finally become a truly revolutionary party.

That doesn't happen without organisation, as when proletarians take on various necessary tasks which impose themselves in the development of the struggle: the blocking of roads, laying siege to police stations, forcing shopkeepers to stop supplying the forces of order, the direct reappropriation of commodities which are necessary for them by looting or the control of stocks... This organisation is never the formalisation of what they are in existing society as the base or anchorage point of the new society to construct as the liberation of what they are, that is to say it is not self-organisation. It does not formalise the existence of any preceding subject. The situation of proletarians is no longer something to organise, to defend and liberate, but something to abolish.

It is interesting to recall the simultaneously conflictual and integrative relations which are created between unemployed, employed proletarians, small shopkeepers, employees of administrations which are still in Algeria more or less involved in a relationship of political clientelism. No unity on the basis of demands can ever be realised. The struggle of the Algerian proletarians of Kabylie imposes itself by direct action, it expresses itself outside of any particular terrain (workplace, neighbourhood...), it negates the divisions maintained by the capitalist class, it tends to its generalisation and it bears a global rejection of the state, it develops itself in opposition to all the legalist, pacifist and electoral slogans.

These proletarians only very rarely assert the "class determinations" of their activity. It is true that this differs in comparison with the preceding

cycle of struggles, where any action no matter how reformist was loudly proclaimed to be the mobilization of the global working class, proud of itself and its flat-cap. That the action of proletarians is no longer proclaimed to be class action does not mean it isn't class action. The questioning by the proletariat of its own existence as a class which objectifies itself against itself as a determination of the reproduction of capital, is a convulsive type of class action, as any self-organization confirms. It is no surprise that proletarians no longer affirm themselves as acting as a class when it is their adversaries who uphold the existence of the proletariat as a class as the dominant content of the counter-revolution facing it.

THE DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENT (DAM)

Because it proclaims the negation of classes as a lifestyle, and thereby, as a precondition for the class struggle, the DAM ends up in a series of dead ends: capital as domination and symbol, the unsolvable question of the DAM's own extension, its reference to needs, to pleasure, to desires, to an "authentic" human self. This dead end appears in the course of riots – their self-limitation (their self-referential character) – and in their "recuperation" in aims which are not their own, as in Quebec, in Prague and also in Genoa. However, this reciprocal exclusion which constitutes the DAM between being proletarian and producing other social relations has become now, in this cycle, the necessary form in which the dynamic of this cycle of struggles manifests itself. Even if the immediate relations of individuals in their singularity end up existing merely as an alternative, the DAM prefigures the content of the communist revolution: the proletariat's contestation, against capital, of its existence as class.

"SUICIDAL" STRUGGLES: THE OBSOLESCENCE OF AUTONOMY

We have already evoked the struggle of Cellatex and those which followed. In December 2002–January 2003, the ACT strike in Angers (IT systems, subsidiary of Bull) is carried out in a contradictory fashion by an inter-union coordination committee and a strike committee “broadly open, emerging from the rank-and-file” (Échanges no.104). Three production lines are momentarily restarted, which does not prevent the rest of the products ending up being burned. It is interesting to review the chronology of the events. The factory is occupied following the announcement, on 20th December, of the definitive liquidation of the ACT (after multiple manouvres and dilatory discussions). The factory is occupied, but no one knows why. On 10th January the strike committee agrees to start the production of electronic cards destined for an Italian equipment supplier. On 22nd January, 200 cards are delivered, on the 23rd the occupants burn cards taken out of storage, and on the 24th the occupants are evicted without difficulty.

If Cellatex can teach us anything in terms of form (violence has a long history in class struggle), but also in terms of content, it is that the dynamic at work in this type of struggle resides in the fact that the proletariat is in itself nothing, but a nothing full of social relations: against capital, the proletariat has no prospect but its disappearance.

In the same period, the workers laid off by Moulinex, in setting fire to a factory building, inscribed themselves equally in the dynamic of this new cycle of struggles in which the proletariat’s own existence as a class is the limit of its class action.

COMMUNISATION

The ultimate limit of the struggle over wages and conditions can be defined as that in which the contradiction between the proletariat and capital comes to a head to such an extent that the definition of class becomes an external constraint, an exteriority simply there because capital

is there. Class membership is exteriorised as a constraint. This is where we find the moment of a qualitative leap in class struggle. It is here that we find a supersession and not an overgrowing. It is here that we can pass from a change in the system to a change of system.

The ultimate point of the reciprocal implication between the classes is that in which the proletariat seizes the means of production. It seizes them, but it cannot appropriate them. An appropriation carried out by the proletariat is a contradiction in terms, because it could only be achieved through its own abolition as class, in a universal union of production in which it is stripped of all that remains of its previous social situation. In communism there is no longer a question of appropriation because it is the very notion of “product” which is abolished. Of course, there are objects (even the notions of objectivity and subjectivity are to be redefined) which are used to produce, others which are directly consumed, and others which are used for both. But to speak about products and to pose the question of their circulation, of their distribution, or of their “transfer”, i.e. to conceive of a moment of appropriation presupposes places of rupture, of “coagulation” of human activity: the market in market societies, the stockpiling and “stint or limit”⁵ in certain visions of communism. The product is not a simple thing. To speak of the product is to suppose that a result of human activity appears as finished in relation to another result, or amongst other results. We should not proceed from the product, but from activity.

In communism, human activity is infinite because it is indivisible. It has concrete or abstract results, but these results are never “products”, for that would raise the question of their appropriation or of their transfer*

5 Translator’s note: *prise au tas*: this is an economic term originating in Kropotkin’s “Conquest of Bread” Ch. 5: “no stint or limit to what the community possesses in abundance, but equal sharing and dividing of those commodities which are scarce or apt to run short”

under some given mode. This infinite human activity synthesizes what one can say about communism. If we can speak of infinite human activity in communism, it is because the capitalist mode of production already allows us to see – albeit contradictorily and not as a “good side” – human activity as a continuous global social flux, and the “general intellect” or the “collective worker” as the dominant force of production. The social character of production does not prefigure anything: it merely renders the basis of value contradictory.

The necessity with which the communist revolution is faced consists not in modifying the share between wages and profit, but in abolishing the capitalist nature of the accumulated means of production. A struggle over wages and conditions can pass from the level of conflict to that of contradiction. The level of conflict is that of the share between wages and profit. It doesn't matter if interests remain irreconcilable on this level: we remain in a zero sum game that is indefinitely reproducible, and as long as we remain on this level the pendulum will swing one way and then another, because we have not attacked the pendulum itself. The level of contradiction is that of surplus value and of productive labour, but one cannot demand to be a little less of a surplus-value producing worker, other than through demanding a slightly higher wage or slightly less hours of work, which brings us back to the questions of distribution and the conflict. It is the insufficiency of surplus-value in relation to accumulated capital which is at the heart of the crisis of exploitation. If at the centre of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital there were not the question of surplus-value producing labour; if there were only a problem of distribution and if all the conflicts over wages were not the existence of this contradiction, the revolution would remain a pious wish. It is thus not by attacking the nature of labour as productive of surplus-value that the struggle over wages is superseded (this would always bring us back to a problem of distribution), but by an attack on the means of production

as capital. A self-organised struggle can take us to the point of rupture, but the attack on the means of production is its supersession.

The attack against the capitalist nature of the means of production is tantamount to their abolition as value absorbing labour in order to valorize itself; it is the extension of gratuity, the potentially physical destruction of certain means of production; their abolition as factories in which the product is defined as product, i.e. the frameworks of exchange and of commerce; it is the upheaval of relations between the sections of production which materialise exploitation and its rate; it is their definition, their setting in individual intersubjective relations; it is the abolition of the division of labour such as it is inscribed in the urban landscape, in the material configuration of buildings, in the separation between town and country, in the very existence of something which one calls a factory or a place of production. "Relations between individuals are fixed in things, because exchange value is by nature material" (Marx, Grundrisse...) The abolition of value is a concrete transformation of the landscape in which we live, it is a new geography. The abolition of social relations is a very material affair.

The production of new social relations between individuals are thus the communist measures, which are taken as a necessity of the struggle. The abolition of exchange and of value, of the division of labour, of property, is nothing but the art of class war: no more no less now than when Napoleon waged his war in Germany through the introduction of the Napoleonic Code. Previous social relations are dissolved in this social activity where one can't distinguish between the activity of strikers and insurgents, and the creation of other relations between individuals; the creation of new relations, in which individuals only consider what is as a moment of an uninterrupted flow of production of human life.

The destruction of exchange: this means the workers attacking the banks which hold their accounts and those of other workers, thus making

it necessary to manage without; this means the workers communicating their “products” to themselves and the community directly and without market; this means the homeless occupying homes, thus “obliging” construction workers to produce freely, the construction workers taking from the shops at liberty, obliging the whole class to organise to seek food in the sectors to be collectivised, etc. Let’s be clear about this. There is no measure which, in itself, taken separately, is “communism”. To distribute goods, to directly circulate means of production and raw materials, to use violence against the existing state: fractions of capital can achieve some of these things in certain circumstances. That which is communist is not “violence” in itself, nor “distribution” of the shit that we inherit from class society, nor “collectivisation” of surplus-value sucking machines: it is the nature of the movement which connects these actions, underlies them, renders them the moments of a process which can only communise ever further, or be crushed.

Military and social activities are indissoluble, simultaneous, and interpenetrating. A revolution cannot be carried out without taking communist measures, without dissolving wage labour, communising supplies, clothing, housing, taking all the weapons (destructive, but also telecommunications, foods, etc.), integrating the destitute (including those which we ourselves will have reduced to this state), the unemployed, the ruined peasants, rootless drop-out students. To speak of a revolution carried out by a “category” which accounts for 20% of the population and which “strikes” to ask of the state that it satisfies its “interests”: that is a joke.

From the moment in which we begin to consume freely, it is necessary to reproduce that which is consumed; for this we lack the primary materials, spare parts, and food (I avoid the unsatisfying concept of “use value” which is an intrinsic concept to the existence of the commodity). It is thus necessary to seize the means of transport, of telecommunications, and enter into contact with other sectors; in doing this one runs up against

opposing armed groups. The confrontation with the state immediately poses the problem of armament, which can only be solved by setting up a distribution network to support combat in an almost infinite multiplicity of places (the constitution of a front or of determinate zones of combat is the death of the revolution). From the moment in which proletarians dismantle the laws of commodity relations, there is no turning back (even more so because, in doing this, capital is deprived of essential goods, and it counter-attacks). Every social deepening, every extension gives flesh and blood to new relations, and enables the integration of more and more non-proletarians to the communising class, which is in the process of constituting and dissolving itself simultaneously. It enables the reorganisation of the productive forces, abolishing to an ever greater extent all competition and division between proletarians, acquiring a military position, and making of this the content and the progress of its armed confrontation against those which the capitalist class can still mobilise, to integrate and reproduce in its social relations.

The capitalist class and its innumerable peripheral strata rest on a complicated tangle of financial connections, credits, and obligations, that is ridden with red-tape, bureaucratic, and vulnerable to the highest point. Without these connections its internal cohesion breaks down. This class is not a community founded on a material association; it is a conglomeration of competitors unified by exchange. Exchange is the abstract community (money). This is why all the measures of communisation will have to be a vigorous action for the dismantling of the connections which link our enemies and their material support: rapid destruction, without the possibility of return. Communisation is not the peaceful organisation of free goods and of a pleasant way of life amongst proletarians. The dictatorship of the social movement of communisation is the process of the integration of humanity to the disappearing proletariat. The strict definition of the proletariat in comparison with other strata – its fight

against all commodity production – is at the same time a process which forces the strata of the salaried petit-bourgeoisie, of the “class of social containment”, to join the communising class. It is thus definition, exclusion and, at the same time demarcation and opening, erasure of the borders and withering away of classes. This is not a paradox, but the reality of the movement in which the proletariat is defined in practice as the movement for the constitution of the human community. The social movement in Argentina was confronted by, and posed, the question of the relations between active proletarians (wage-earning), the unemployed, and the excluded and middle strata. It has only brought extremely fragmentary responses, of which the most interesting is without doubt that of its territorial organisation. In this situation, the radical sworn opponents of interclassism or the propagandists of national democratic unanimity are the militants of two different types of defeat. The revolution which in this cycle of struggles can no longer be anything but communisation, supersedes the dilemma between the Leninist or democratic class alliances and Gorter’s “proletariat alone”.

The only way of superseding the conflicts between the unemployed and those with jobs, between the qualified and the unqualified, is to carry out from the start, in the course of the armed struggle, the measures of communisation which remove the very basis of this division (this is something which the recouperated companies in Argentina, when confronted by this question, tried only very marginally, being generally satisfied (cf. Zanon) with some charitable redistribution to groups of piqueteros.) In the absence of this, capital will play on this fragmentation throughout the movement, and will find its Noske and Scheidemann amongst the self-organised⁶. The crises of the capitalist mode of production

6 Noske is known for brutally putting down communist uprisings in Germany 1919, Scheidemann proclaimed the Weimar Republic in 1918 to stave off a workers’ revolution.

are not a guarantee of revolutionary process: the capitalist class knows perfectly well how to use them to decompose the working class. In fact, what the German revolution had already shown, is that it is a question of dissolving the middle strata while taking concrete communist measures which force them to begin to join the proletariat, i.e. to achieve their “proletarianisation”. Nowadays in developed countries, the question is at the same time simpler and more dangerous. On the one hand a massive majority of the middle strata is salaried and thus no longer has a material base to its social position; its role of containment and of management of capitalist cooperation is essential but permanently being rendered precarious; and its social position depends upon the very fragile mechanism of the subtraction of fractions of surplus value. But on the other hand for these very same reasons, its formal proximity to the proletariat pushes it to present, in these struggles, national or democratic alternative managerial “solutions” which would preserve its own positions. It could be at ease in radical democratism expressing the limits of struggles. There will be no miracle solution because there is no unifying demand. The class only unifies itself through breaking the relation in which the demands have their meaning: the capitalist relation. The essential question which we will have to solve is to understand how we extend communism, before it is suffocated in the pincers of the commodity; how we integrate agriculture so as not to have to exchange with peasants; how we do away with the exchange-based relations of the opponent to impose on him the logic of the communisation of relations and of the seizure of goods; how, faced with the revolution, we dissolve the block of fear through the revolution.

The proletarians “are” not revolutionaries like the sky “is” blue, because they “are” salaried and exploited, nor “are” they the dissolution of existing conditions. In their self-transformation they constitute themselves from what they are, as a revolutionary class.

The restructuring, as it is in itself

ROLAND SIMON

FIRST METHODOLOGICAL POINT

The capitalist mode of production which arises from the restructuring must be considered for itself, and we must seek a criterion of coherence and of reproduction on its own terms, rather than define or judge it in relation to the norms of capital in the previous period (post-war boom, or Fordism).

SECOND METHODOLOGICAL POINT

We must avoid confusing the contradictions in which the capitalist mode of production necessarily functions with any 'crisis', or even considering its reproduction as a constant 'potential crisis'. Indeed, that would mean imagining that a fully functioning capitalism is one without contradictions or tensions.

THIRD METHODOLOGICAL POINT

Everything gets restructured: companies, processes of labour, circulations of capital, transportation, social systems, States, classes, global cycles, etc. Some analysts multiply the restructurings in order to avoid seeing the restructuring of the valorisation of capital, that is to say of exploitation, that is, of the contradiction between proletariat and capital. My aim here is to suggest a synthesis that could qualify the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production. If there is a restructuring, then it is a restructuring of the contradiction between classes— the structure, the content of class struggle, the production of its becoming are then modified. The more one multiplies 'restructurings', the more this gets blurred.

We will only consider the restructuring through three determinations: (1) the transformation of the wage relation and of the labour market, (2) the modification of the immediate production process, and (3) the globalization of the reproduction of capital.

THE RESTRUCTURING IN ITS DETERMINATIONS

1) THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE LEVEL OF WAGES AND OF THE LABOUR MARKET.

At this level, the capitalism which underwent restructuring no longer functions on a 'Keynesian or Fordist equilibrium' between wages as 'cost' and as 'investment'. This only means one thing: the restructuring is not 'Fordist' (Fordism could only be efficient in a limited number of national areas in the Centre.)

The "compromise" that was called "Fordist" has no more disappeared than the Welfare State has, yet it no longer structures the relation between proletariat and capital. Instead it has itself become part of the new modalities of exploitation. Precariousness has become generalised in the sense that it structures the totality of the purchase-sale relation between labour and capital, rather than being a pure suppression of what is outside of it. Precariousness is not only that part of employment which can be termed precarious *stricto sensu*. "Stable" employment also adopts the characteristics of precariousness: flexibility, mobility, constant availability, with a form of outsourcing which makes even the "stable" employment in small companies as precarious as the target-related way of functioning in big companies.

The revitalisation of the absolute mode of surplus-value extraction takes place through a global purchase of labour power. With the general development of precariousness, flexibility and all forms of short labour contracts, unemployment is no longer the outside of labour it used to be during the post war boom. The fragmentation of labour resolves itself in

its purchase by capital globally, and in the utilisation of each individual labour power according to the punctual needs of valorisation. Labour power is then presupposed as the property of capital not only formally (workers have always belonged to the capitalist class as a whole before selling their labour power to a specific capital), but also actually, as capital pays for the individual reproduction of the worker independently of its immediate consumption which, for each labour power, is incidental. Inversely, labour power which is directly active, productively consumed, sees its necessary labour come back to itself as an individual fraction which is defined not only by the exclusive needs of its own reproduction, but also as a fraction of general labour power (representing the totality of necessary labour)—a fraction of necessary labour globally. The tendency is toward an equalization between income as wages and unemployment benefits—there being an institutional contagion of each one toward the other. From this point of view, in “developed areas” (we will see below why this concept should be used cautiously), the dissociation of employment income from subsistence income could be a significant simplification. It is the path opened in numerous countries by the “back to work” schemes which involve holding onto a decreasing form of welfare while at once going back to work—the intention being to facilitate the transition from unemployment to part-time jobs—essentially intended for the “inactive” part of the female workforce—or temporary ones. The rise in the rate of employment is one of the essential characteristics of the restructuring. What is at stake for the capitalist class is no longer to reduce the demand for labour (part-time jobs, lowering of retirement age, etc.) but to boost the offer for workers.

This global purchase transforms drastically the functioning of the Welfare State, which in countries where it exists does not disappear. It rather becomes fragmented in order to secure that the totality of disposable workers are permanently employable. It no longer acts only on the wage-

earning population, but now also on the rate of employment and the disposable population. This is the passage from Welfare to Workfare. The increase of surplus-value in the absolute mode is activated not only because, throughout the world, a larger number of workers participate in the labour process while necessary labour time hardly increases, but also because of the intensification of the labour process that results from this expansion of workers globally – global labour time is extended and the rotation of fixed capital accelerates. If necessary labour is extended to the reproduction of global labour power, it is because surplus-labour itself depends on this global labour power, which is a factor of the increasing intensity, productivity, and increase in the number of disposable workers.

To restore a minima the conditions of its realisation, an increasing part of surplus-value is recycled and distributed (via the financialisation of the economy) toward the more well-off section of workers. The growth of inequality is not a defect of this process in the sense that it could be corrected or is contrary to the understood interest of an ideal capitalism. The growth of inequality is instead an essential part—a functional one—of this new “accumulation regime” (if we want to use that expression). It does not resolve the problem of realisation in as “virtuous” a way as “Fordism”, but it is this resolution which is the existing one. The high level of self-financing of companies in central countries indicates that the majority of these financial incomes is orientated toward consumption. These financial incomes have a functional character in the actual system of accumulation in that they have become an essential element of the realisation of value.

The current situation contains an enigma: the rate of profit grows at a far faster rhythm than the accumulation rate. It is the lack of profitable investment opportunities which leads to the recycling of extracted surplus-value, and in another way to the swelling of the financial sphere. This swelling is not an obstacle to the “real economy”, but its result. The

problem must be situated on a global scale. It was easy to speak of a “Fordist compromise” when four fifths of the global population was excluded from it. The massive increase of the labour power mobilised by capital on a world scale suppresses all relevance of the relation between production, productivity, and the realisation of value on a national or regional scale. This means that structural transformations in the relation between production, profit and the realisation of value become “embodied” in a geographical organisation of exchanges (see the commercial and financial relations between the United States and China, for example.) Inherent risks to the current circuit of value realisation are well known: the debt of U.S. homeowners, the perpetuation of foreign investment of US capital... the system is at the mercy of the smallest “incident”. But capitalist accumulation has never been exceptionally stable, or without contradictions. It is important to consider the system as it exists and to measure its limits, rather than to assume that it does not exist because its limits aren’t those of the previous one.

2) TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE LABOUR PROCESS

a) The “limits of Taylorism”: value and cooperation.

Capital’s basic determinants cannot be considered insurmountable obstacles to its restructuring.

In basing one’s analysis on the accounts of workers the opinion is often held, paradoxically, that Taylorism cannot function without workers’ initiative. Taylorism then would correspond to capitalism in so far as its *raison d’être* is value accumulation, value which must remain divisible, identifiable and separable into a homogeneous substance: time. But Taylorism would remain inadequate to capitalism in so far as it implies cooperation.

What are sometimes put forward as the limits of Taylorism are simply contradictions inherent to the capitalist mode of production. It is obvious

that the latter cannot, in any case, escape from these contradictions. Either the “contradictions” which are inherent to it are also its dynamic, or the domination of capital should have ended as early as its emergence in manufacturing.

b) Technical and organisational innovations.

From the beginning of the 90s “computerized Taylorism” has boosted productivity in a powerful enough way for it to approximate the rate of economic growth it had in the 60s. The second half of the 90s saw the end of the famous Solow paradox: “computers are seen everywhere but in productivity indexes”. The gap between execution and management is inherent to capital, and it is therefore not by the elimination of this gap, but by its deepening, that the limits of a historical organisation of labour are overcome. In introducing computer technology into the labour process, capital has assimilated itself to the collective knowledge of workers, along with their functional empowerment which was being developed in the Fordist assembly line. Computer technology eliminated a lot of idle time by saturating labour stations, and maximizing the rotation of fixed capital. It gave to the social forces of labour, which were developed in cooperation, an existence adequate to their own nature: this nature became objectified in specific components of fixed capital. Capital did not make the assembly line more humane, and all the experiences from the beginning of the 70s remained marginal. Yet the bitter irony is that it was on the basis of these organisational experiences that electronics and information technologies gained, a few years later, all their force.

At the present moment, just-in-time production is only the social generalisation of the assembly line. For a long time, social obstacles (labour’s refusal of its division and deskilling, the importance of organisations in specific crafts, maintenance services) and technical obstacles (the complexity of equipment, an inability to store specialist knowledge and put it at the disposal of less skilled workers in a decentralised way, etc.) were enough

to prevent the extension of the model of the assembly line beyond the car industry and a few other sectors, despite the new system's advantages in terms of meeting deadlines and maintaining stocks. Just-in-time production equally allows the substitution of many distinct units for a single "big company", these units being located near their principal clients. The whole logic of the organisation of production based on regional specialisation is shattered. The disappearance of workers identity only follows logically from this restructuring of the relation of exploitation, because the latter comes to consist of a multitude of "small facts" which concern the totality of the reproduction of the relation between the proletariat and capital.

What characterises the current period is the massive extension of Taylorist principles in labour organisation to all sectors, from industry to services. Currently Taylorism is in the process of becoming the dominant mode of labour in the totality of economic activities. The new organisation of labour, it is Taylorism.

c) Organisation of the labour process: workers' collectivism / cycles of struggle.

Workers rebelled against Taylorism. As an organisation of labour, it had become a key tool for workers' resistance. The failure in Turin and elsewhere should not be understood as a reduction of workers to a subordinate status in exchange for "high wages". "High wages" were won for those who did not have a subordinate status (skilled workers, white-collar workers), while a subordinate status became the lot of those who did not obtain "high wages". The constant during the Hot Autumn of 1969 in the Fiat factories was the demand by unskilled workers for higher wages, while the CGIL, having their base in other sections of workers than the unskilled, constantly tried to bring conflicts back to capital's control of labour's organisation.

The limits of Taylorism in the previous phase of expansion are not to be found solely in the labour process, but instead in its meeting with a

homogeneous labour power (in the context of a labour market in which unemployment is low and productivity gains are high). Taylorism was a weapon against skilled workers, but it ended up producing a labour force which was at once collective at the level of the factory, and social at the level of the reproduction of the whole. Taylorism showed itself to be incapable of absorbing this new force. Taylorism was only a limit of the labour process in being itself an instance of class struggle.

On all fronts, from the labour market to the production process in its materiality, as well as the Welfare State, and political and union representation, the capitalist class has been able to de-structure workers power as it emerged, and to create other ways of mobilising labour power. It is this which ended up holding together as a system.

The capitalist class faced two necessities: first to break workers' collectivism, and secondly to break the relation between wage increases and productivity gains. It is from this that it reorganised, little by little, labour into a new process of immediate production.

Whether it is in sectors previously Taylorised (where the organisation of labour gets profoundly modified), or in the more numerous sectors where the methods of Taylorism impose themselves in a different way, but in keeping the basic principles of Taylorism— workers' collectivism is shattered. Some sections are excluded or confined to subordinate tasks: unskilled workers, artisans, young people finishing short technical studies. Skilled workers whose technical skills are put into question and whose autonomy is contested are on unsure footing in relation to operators and technicians (this is also the case for supervisory staff). Others are "valorised": the operators who deal with automated systems, and the technicians of production. The latter become the pivot around which this process of collective class restructuring is organised.

Labour has been reorganised into groups or teams around a "monitor" (intermediary grade between worker and team leader), a system of collective

and individual bonuses has been introduced, a system of self control inside teams has been established, and foremen have been replaced by young people from technical schools). Bonuses attributed to the whole team lead to the reprimanding of non-compliance being effected by the group itself, with those not wanting to accept minimal standards of “participation” being marginalised. At the same time, the massive presence of temporary workers acts as a permanent threat toward workers’ positions, even if they are often given the most difficult jobs.

The new organisation of labour made the “workers elite”—skilled workers autonomous in their section—disappear from sight. Skilled workers, the essential figure of the previous cycle of struggle, used to socialise the unskilled ones in specifically working-class institutions and used to represent a hope of promotion. Now, there is a big gap between the level of unskilled workers and the level of the technicians, who are completely remote from the workers despite their physical presence on the shop floor.

3) GLOBALISATION

The globalisation of capital is not a characteristic among other characteristics, it is the general form of restructuring. It is only in this new form that the fluidity of capital’s reproduction exists. It is not its dynamic, as the dynamic remains that of relative surplus value, but it is the synthesis of all the restructuring’s characteristics.

Globalisation is not a homogeneous extension of capitalist relations onto each parcel of territory constituting the planet, but a specific structure of exploitation and of its reproduction, such that it restructures itself geographically. Fragmentation, flexibility, the lowering of the value of labour power in the social arrangement of its reproduction and maintenance, have all become in themselves processes of unlimited diffusion, and are akin to the transformation of surplus-value into additional capital, or

the latter's appropriation of the social forces of labour. To approach the transformations of the global market only as a matter of competition between capitals is to have merely a partial vision of globalisation.

a) Homogeneity, hierarchy and endogenous capitalist development.

Capitalism no longer presupposes a homogeneous arena wherein each commodity owner is equivalent to the next. When it concerns the owner of that very special commodity, labour power, capital takes delight in the diversity of its origins, of its particularities, or the originality of its modes of formation and reproduction, and its segmentation. Both the fragmentation and the homogeneity of the arena of capitalist accumulation lie in the transformation of value into prices of production, with the equalisation of the rate of profit that this includes.

Capitalism no more presupposes a "homogeneous space" (the one of petty commodity production) than it presupposes that a country can only become a capitalist one by developing the conditions of capital in an endogenous manner. To ask the question "can they industrialise the Third World?" (Souyri), while imagining that a positive answer would mean an equal competition between the United States and Taiwan, with both of them being coherent and self-centred states, obviously implies that the answer is going to be negative. In the game of global competition, for sport shoes for example, it is obvious that Indonesia or Vietnam cannot compete with the American manufacturer Nike (or conversely...?). Entry onto the world market is controlled by a restricted number of firms, and this arena is from the start an "enmeshed space" (Michalet). It consists in the tangling of three levels: the structures put into place by large firms and their subcontractors, the hierarchical internal "markets" of multinationals, and the alliances between multinationals. Access to the world market can rarely avoid this entanglement.

b) Financial capital and globalization

Globalisation is a three dimensional phenomenon: the dimension of exchange of goods and services, the dimension of direct foreign investment, and the dimension of the circulation of financial capital. These three dimensions are obviously interdependent and the succession of the historical configurations of globalisation results from the transformation of the hierarchy of interdependencies between these three dimensions (Charles-Albert Michalet, *Qu'est-ce que la Mondialisation*, Ed. La Découverte). On this basis Michalet sets up three configurations as “ideal types”: the international configuration, the multi-national one, and the global one. The latter is the current configuration, linked to the domination of financial capital. But Michalet does not go beyond this typology, that is to say he does not organically relate the hierarchy of interdependencies and the modalities of surplus-value extraction as the general process of capital.

It is totally true that financial circulation neither creates value nor surplus-value. However it should be noticed, and this is not negligible, that it redistributes profits, and that it is the essential vector of the balancing out of capital. It carries out this balancing act not only between capitals of the “real economy”, but also between the functional fractions of capital (productive capital, commercial capital, financial capital). In this sense it is formative of the global cycle of capital. In this formation financial circulation and its logic overflow and extend themselves to the so-called “real” dimensions of the economy: production and exchange of goods and services. Productive capital functions through financial dynamics that define its profitability and the structure of the crisis at that level.

In the global system, states and regional ensembles of states now find themselves to be spaces necessary to the definition and management of the differentiations internal to the totality. These areas, in the logic of finance, have the tendency to merge into monetary zones (dollar, yen, euro), between which an arbitration between the different rates of the financial markets and exchange rates can be played out which, if they depend on

anticipations (and on the effective realisation) of profits, translate the conditions of the valorisation of value into a language which determines the transfer of capital. If the national frame loses some relevance as it is no longer the basic element of a multi-nationalisation, in the framework of continental regrouping it still assumes the responsibility of managing, as a middle term, the regional infra-national specialisation.

We can't simply acknowledge the importance of the logic of finance whilst reassuring ourselves that truth is in productive capital, as if the former did not help form the latter. Capital never escapes in a fictitious valorisation, but the valorisation of capital as productive capital can be subordinated to the rules of valorisation of fictitious capital, that is, the rules of "capitalisation". We are here simply confronted with a tendency contained in the concept of capital itself as a social force, the independence of money-capital being the accomplished form of this social force.

c) Globalisation, valorisation of inequalities and territorial dissociation.

The territories of so-called "underdeveloped" countries (now called "new industrial countries" or "emerging countries") are "dissociated territories" or "mosaic-systems". (Laurent Carroué, *Géographie de la mondialisation*, Ed. Armand Colin). Such a dissociated and systematically extroverted national territory creates problems of unity and national construction for the state, while, for the proletariat, the constraints to its reproduction escape all the necessities which confine it to this "national" area. The logic of the "dissociation of territories" is not only a determination of the North-South relation, but a general one of the restructuring—it equally transforms the previously constituted dominant areas.

For the many countries that depend on it, foreign trade is not the juxtaposition of truly autonomous entities, but, more often than not, an organisation internal to multi-nationals. Neither the development of heavy industries nor the development of those industries producing consumer goods take place within a national framework of extensive

accumulation, the only framework in which their development could be considered blocked in relation to an “external variable”, the global market being considered a constant.

d) De-structuring and re-composition.

The destructuring of all national capital appears as an obvious fact, both in emerging economies and—far more interesting if we want to understand the nature of the phenomenon—in most developed centres. Considering the national or local framework, capital destructures; considering the three levels (global, continental, national or local), whatever the sector of activity, capital strongly structures the space of its valorisation, that is to say of the reproduction of capitalist social relations. The structuring is elsewhere, in the state/infra-state/supra-state forms of territorial planning and management of the workforce, in the structure of firms and networks. If those are only responsible for a minor fraction of global capitalist production, they nonetheless control and order the sectors in which they are active and, for the quasi-totality of companies, they are a necessary path to market access.

Destructuration is only an illusion of scale. But the juxtaposition of corporate strategies which are coherent, at their level, does not imply ipso facto the coherence of the reproduction of capitalist social relations.

e) Globalisation: disjunction between the valorisation of capital and the reproduction of labour power.

The new global capitalist organisation dictates, at the global level, the content and form of the capitalist relation of exploitation as it emerged from the restructuring which arose from the workers defeat at the beginning of the 70s. The combined localisation of industry, finance and labour was replaced by the disjunction between valorisation of capital and reproduction of labour power.

It is easy to imagine a global coherence of valorisation if we remain at the most general level: the capitalist hyper-centres concentrating the highest

functions (finances, high technologies, research centres), secondary zones concentrating the activities which necessitate intermediary technologies, such as logistics and commercial distribution, zones whose limits are fluid with the periphery, (concentrated on assembly activities, often through sub-contracting), and lastly, crisis zones and “social sinks” where a whole informal economy based on more or less illegal products flourishes.

This “black” economy not only enables these zones to survive but also enables the fluidity of the regions around them, thanks to the traffic of workers, energy, and capital of “un-declared” origins.

If the valorisation of capital is unified through this zoning, the situation is nonetheless different for the reproduction of labour-power. Each of these zones has specific modalities of reproduction.

In the first world there are some sections with high salaries along with a privatisation of social risks, interwoven with other sections of the labour force which still benefit from “Fordism”, and others, more and more numerous, submitted to the global purchase of labour power.

In the second regulation takes place thanks to low wages imposed by the pressures of internal migrations and the precariousness of labour, islets of more or less stable international subcontracting, no or almost no guaranties against social risks, and migrations of labour.

The third world it is humanitarian aid, diverse forms of trafficking, agricultural survival, regulation by all sorts of mafias and more or less microscopic wars, but also the revitalising of local and ethnic solidarities which defines stability. Capitalism is in the process of transforming clans, ethnicities, and “primary sociability” into specific organs of the reproduction of its available labour power. The disjunction between the unified valorisation of capital, and the reproduction of the labour power adequate to this valorisation, is total. Between the two we find the disappearance of the strictly equivalent reciprocal implication between

mass production and the modalities of the reproduction of labour power distinctive of Fordism.

The “mis-en-abîme” of this zoning is a functional determination of capital: it maintains, despite the rupture between the two, the expansion of global markets and the global expansion of the available workforce, outside their necessary relation within a predetermined area of reproduction. The rupture of a necessary relation between the valorisation of capital and the reproduction of labour power breaks the coherent areas of reproduction in their regional or even national delimitations. In this new world, a system of repression is set up almost everywhere, pre-positioned in a narrow conformity between the organisation of violence and the organisation of the economy, to the point of obliterating the distinction between war and peace, between policing operations and wars. A mode of regulation.

f) Unification of capitalist space.

This unification has never before been as strict, precisely because there are no longer any autonomous and self-centred spaces, and because it takes place, on all scales, through the interpenetration of the most modern and most marginal spaces. It is precisely this extreme unity of interpenetration—the end of a clear distinction between these different spaces—that we usually, in our nostalgia for Fordism, only see dispersal.

Disjunction between reproduction of labour power and valorisation of capital / “mis-en-abîme” of the global hierarchy in each particular space. It is on these two interlinked points that the coherence of the global reproduction of capitalist social relations is now based. The “chaos” is so obvious that it prevents us from seeing beyond it. But this chaos is only the order of the capitalist restructuring. The fundamental determinations of the restructured relation of exploitation are extended globally and everywhere reproduced on all scales by the fluidity of the reproduction of capital which is imposed by the relative mode of surplus value extraction. The territorially connected localisation of the reproduction of labour

power and of the valorisation of capital was the paradigmatic obstacle to this fluidity and summarized all the others.

In China, Mexico, Africa, the vertiginous expansion of urban misery is concomitant with a huge extension of exchange. These recently urbanised masses are seized by these exchange circuits— their very misery is the result.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF THE RESTRUCTURING: A CRITERION, CYCLES OF STRUGGLE.

What is essential to decide, if there was a restructuring of the capitalist social relation, is not an accumulation of facts, but the criterion by which they are judged. If the dynamic of the system is taken as this criterion then the only possible conclusion—as long as one takes this criterion seriously (that is to say doesn't expect a modified system to fulfil the promises of the previous one)—is that a restructuring took place.

The basic synthetic principle of the restructuring consists in the abolition and transformation of everything that can constitute an obstacle to the self-presupposition of capital—to its fluidity. Restructured capital is still capital, it experiences serious difficulties, but these are its own specific difficulties and not due to the fact that it is no longer what it was “previously”. In a system of exploitation in which wage labour is organised as precarious, and is rotated as sometimes enormous masses, capital frees a mass of available labour superior to the one it absorbs productively. This mass is at the same time the condition of the new modalities of exploitation and a real problem of “regulation”. The disjunction between the valorisation of capital and the reproduction of labour power, which is a general characteristic of the globalisation of the relation of exploitation, creates a problematic regime of development in which the readjustment of the rate of profit does not translate itself ipso facto into a readjustment of the rate of accumulation. In the current labour process, the capitalist class finds with difficulty the “optimum combination” between organisational

and technological modifications. The economy of contemporary neo-Taylorism has managed to break, at least provisionally, the secular tendency of capitalism to constantly augment its capitalistic intensity, that is, the need of immobilised capital for each unity of surplus-value produced. However, this “new lease of life for capitalism” (Guillaume Duval), is still problematic: productivity gains are no longer increasing, the progress of automation which could make them increase is partly blocked, material investments—and therefore the production of means of production—are regularly held up. . . the surplus value produced, because of the very modalities of the increase of profitability, find only with difficulty profitable opportunities for investment, companies’ need for capital is limited, restrictive wage policies, corollary to organisational policies, structurally limit the realisation of value.

But even this criterion is not pertinent, for it remains within the objectivity of an economic discourse and analysis. A restructuring of the capitalist mode of production is a restructuring of the contradiction between proletariat and capital.

What had become an obstacle to valorisation on the basis of the extraction of surplus-value in its relative mode was the way in which were interlocked: first, the integration of the reproduction of labour power; second the transformation of surplus-value into additional capital, and lastly the increase of surplus value in its relative mode in the immediate production process.

Unlike the previous cycle of struggle, the restructuring abolished all specification, status, welfare, “Fordist compromise”, and division of the global cycle into national areas of accumulation, in a fixed relation between centre and periphery. All that could be an obstacle to the fluidity of the self-presupposition of capital—in the immediate production process (assembly line, cooperation, production-maintenance, collective worker, continuity of the process of production, subcontracting, fragmentation of

the workforce), as well as in the reproduction and mobilisation of labour-power (work, unemployment, training, welfare) and in the modalities of accumulation and circulation—is abolished. The novelty of the period lies in the structure and the content of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital which is situated at the level of reproduction.

This restructuring abolished and overcame the contradiction which used to underlie the previous cycle of struggle between, on the one hand, the creation and the development of a labour power produced, reproduced and used by capital in a collective and social way, and, on the other hand, the limited forms of the appropriation of this labour power by capital in the immediate production process and in the reproduction process. It was the conflictual situation which in the previous cycle of struggle manifested itself as a workers' identity, confirmed in the very reproduction of capital, which was abolished by the restructuring. From this workers' identity produced and confirmed in the reproduction of capital ensued both a powerful workers movement and practices in rupture with it, such as autonomy and self-organisation. There is no restructuring of the capitalist mode of production without a workers defeat. This defeat was the defeat of workers' identity, of the communist parties, of unionism, of self-management, of self-organisation, of the refusal of work. It is a whole cycle of struggle which was defeated, in all its aspects. The restructuring is essentially counter-revolution, and the latter cannot be measured according to a death toll.

To act as a class at the moment is, on the one hand, to have capital and the categories of its reproduction as one's only horizon; on the other, it is, for the same reasons, to be in contradiction with one's own reproduction as a class, to put it into question.

We are not speaking here of a simple change of form or even of content, but of a transformation of the composition of the working class and thus of its practices. The new cycle of struggles is not a structuralist miracle, but the

action of a recomposed working class. We are speaking of the disappearance of workers strongholds and the proletarianisation of white-collar workers, of the transfer of factory work to the service sector (maintenance specialists, machine drivers, truck drivers, delivery men, warehousemen, etc— this kind of employment now represents the majority of blue-collar jobs). We are speaking of labour in smaller companies or sites, of a new division of labour and of the working class, with the exteriorisation of activities with low added-value (young workers, paid at minimal wage, often temporary workers, without any job prospects). Of the generalisation of just-in-time production, of the existence of young workers for whom school education broke any continuity with the previous generation and who massively reject factory work and the working class condition in general. Of the shifting of production offshore, of the global segmentation of labour power, its employment and its reproduction.

It is not the figure of the precarious worker, as a specific social position, which is, in itself, the new central figure of working class recomposition— it is instead the figure of the worker which is socially Taylorised and, because of this, is contaminated by all characteristics of precariousness.

The paradox of this new class composition is that it prevents the recognition of the existence of the working class at the very time as its condition is spread, and this “disappearance” is only the effect of the new composition and of its fragmentation. Now that the contradictory relation between the proletariat and capital is only defined in the fluidity of capitalist reproduction, the proletariat can only confront capital in the movement in which it is itself reproduced as a class. This confrontation of the proletariat with its own class constitution is now the content of class struggle. What is at stake in this struggle is the putting into question by the proletariat of its own existence as a class and of all classes.

Questions on the concept of cycle of struggles

THURSDAY, 22 MAY 2008

ROLAND SIMON

It will be necessary to begin with the current definition and relevance of this concept and the theoretical issues it addresses. But we can already list a few questions the concept triggers, those questions belonging to all the fields of theoretical investigation.

* The difference between a period of accumulation and a cycle of struggles : the economy issue.

* Does a cycle of struggles correspond to the capital cycles ? The development of the capital is identical to the contradiction between proletariat and capital, but are we dealing here with an unmediated identity ?

* Is to talk about cycle of struggles to accept the validity of the “Kondratieffs” ? If it is so, is a cycle of struggles informed, in its course, by the phases A and B of a “Kondratieff” ? If it is so, are revolutionary crises linked to a systemic crisis of the Kondratieffs ? Are they located between two Kondratieffs or between the A and B phases of a same Kondratieff ?

* A fundamental and very tricky question : relation and continuity between the cycles of struggles. Are the cycles of struggles separate entities (radically discontinuous) ? how do we relate now to previous cycles ?

* How can we theoretically formalize the passage from one cycle to the other ? Do we have to include the concept of counter-revolution in the cycle of struggles concept ? Is the passage a juxtaposition or a coordination ? (it is not exactly the same question as the one of continuity)

* A question linked to the previous two : does a “legacy” exist? What is a legacy ?

* Do all the elements defining (determining) a cycle of struggles have the same temporality : immediate struggles, revolutionary crises, theories, organisations ? Do anachronisms exist ? Can an old cycle, under some aspects, endure when another one has begun ? Is there integration or overlapping ?

* At what stage in the definition of a cycle must we consider its internal contradictions ? Inversely, what is the unity of a cycle ?

* The nature of the failure of a cycle of struggles : is the impossibility in its own terms a valid explanatory structure for all the cycles ?

* Relation between cycle of struggles / failure (internal impossibilities) / limits / counter-revolution ?

* The issue of chronological division. Are there different chronological phases in a same cycle ? (whatever the answer is to the link with the Kondratieffs) Can we divide into subsets a cycle of struggles ? If it is so, what is the relevance and the validity of such a division ? Why do we consider them as phases of a same cycle and not as two different cycles ?

* What is the starting point of the definition of a cycle : a blend of micro-facts or a structure that gives meaning to these facts ?

* Is it relevant to make a periodization of historically homogenic cycles of struggles in spite of national differences and the notions of centre and periphery ?

Courage!

The concept of the cycle of struggles

JUNE 8, 2008

ROLAND SIMON. FROM MEETING – REVUE
INTERNATIONALE POUR LA COMMUNISATION.

The common reflexion and discussion work could consist in submitting the definition of the concept of cycle of struggles that I propose in the few following pages and the theoretical principles underlying it to the series of questions that I asked in a preceding mail.

THE CONCEPT OF CYCLE OF STRUGGLES

What we call cycle of struggles is the whole of the struggles, organisations and theories that constitute a historically defined practice of the proletariat in the reciprocal implication between the two terms of the exploitation which is the dynamic contradiction of the mode of capitalist production. This whole of practices and struggles by which this contradiction, in each specific phase of its historical development, carries revolution and communism as well as its overcoming.

In the first place, even if the chronological landmarks may be identical, the concept of cycle of struggles does not coincide with the one of a historical period of the capitalist mode of production. In the concept of cycle of struggles, the practice of the proletariat is defined as one of the prominent aspect of a totality by which this totality produces its overcoming. As a consequence, a cycle of struggles is a period of the mode of capitalist production that is considered in as much as it produces its overcoming.

The definition of the concept of cycle of struggles articulates around three great principles:

Exploitation – as a contradiction between proletariat and capital – is simultaneously defined as the reciprocal implication of these terms and the production of each one's specificity as far as its situation and practice are concerned. It is not the exploitation in itself, or the development of the capitalist mode of production that carries its overcoming, they carry it only by the specific situation and activity of the proletariat as a revolutionary class and as a class of the mode of capitalist production.

The historical production of the revolution and of communism: both are the overcoming that each cycle of struggles specifically produces.

The contradiction between proletariat and capital is simultaneously the dynamics of the development of the modern mode of capitalist production and of its overcoming, the outcome of which is that a cycle of struggles defines itself in its whole as the relationship between, on one side, the daily course of the class struggle, and, on the other side, revolution and communism in their historical content.

I. THE CONCEPT OF CYCLE OF STRUGGLES IS PART OF THE DEFINITION OF EXPLOITATION

1) SPECIFIC PRACTICE AND RECIPROCAL IMPLICATION

Exploitation is the first great principle that defines what a cycle of struggles is. The definition of a cycle of struggles comes from an understanding of the exploitation in which the reciprocal implication between the terms of the contradiction, proletariat and capital, as well as their specification and their autonomy are simultaneously laid. Without this, there is no cycle of struggle, that is to say no specific practices of the proletariat against the capital, as a particularisation of a whole of which the capital is precisely the other necessary term. A cycle of struggles is a phase of the capital in as much as it is producing its overcoming by the specific activity of the proletariat as a pole of the contradiction which, because it is a reciprocal implication, particularises itself.

In their contradictory relationship, proletariat and capital each have a specific position and activity. It is this process of particularisation of those terms, which is intrinsic to the contradiction, that we are up to define, while considering them precisely as terms of a contradiction, that is to say as a mutual implication. Exploitation is not the content of a contradictory relationship between two symmetric terms, it is a difference in the relationship to the whole, which, regarding its content, determines one term to be questioned and to overcome this whole. The capitalist mode of production and exploitation only carry their overcoming in the situation and specific activity of the proletariat as a pole (particularisation) of the whole capitalist mode of production.

Exploitation as a relationship between the proletariat and the capital is a contradiction as it is a process in contradiction with its own reproduction (fall of the profit rate), a whole in which each element only exists in relation to the other, and defines itself in this relation as a contradiction with the other and because of this with itself, as the relationship defines it: productive work and accumulation of capital; surplus labour and necessary work; valorisation and immediate work. The capital is a contradiction in process, which means that the movement exploitation is a contradiction of the production social relationships of which exploitation is the content and the movement. In this light, it is a game that can lead to the abolition of its rule. The capital as a contradiction in process is the class struggle, when we say that exploitation is a contradiction for itself, we define the situation and the revolutionary activity of the proletariat.

Exploitation is the valorisation of the capital, it has three constitutive moments:

The confrontation of the work force and of the capital as potential capital. This confrontation makes sense only in its resolution, the purchase-sale of the work force.

The subsumption of work under the capital (surplus value production)

The transformation of the surplus value in additional capital : the reproduction of the confrontation, the separation, are the starting point and the main result of the production process.

It is this same transformation of the surplus value into additional capital that is never ascertained, because of competition of course on the most superficial level, but above all because of the fact that this transformation implies on one side the meeting of the commodity capital and of the money as capital or means of circulation (it is the general possibility of the crises), and on the other side because it implies the underlying transformation of the surplus value into profit, therefore the relation between the surplus value and the total engaged capital. The fall of the profit rate is constantly the anguish at the heart of self-presupposition, or without circumlocution, the “never ascertained” nature of this transformation in additional capital and so of the renewing of the process whose terms are produced as subjects. This production of subjects within the reciprocal implication does not occur at the end of each cycle, it is permanent in the course of the valorisation process and funds the autonomy and the practice of the proletariat and of the capital during the whole process. The problematic character of the transformation of the surplus value into additional capital is also the transformations of the capital, the bankruptcies, the redundancies as well as the augmentations of the production paces and the transformation of the process of work. The transformation of the surplus value into additional capital is first and foremost the extraction of a sufficient surplus value to allow for this transformation.

The exploitation relation is, on the one hand, the content of the reciprocal implication of the proletariat and the capital, the fact that they are the terms of a same whole, and, on the other hand, their production as genuinely active subjects of this whole, that has no other movement than the one that results from the actions of its subjects. It is in this relation, at

the general level of analysis, in the unity of its moments, that the “never ascertained” character of its reproduction constantly exists.

The “never ascertained” character of the renewing of the three constitutive moments of the exploitation blends in with the particularisation movement of the contradictory terms of the whole. It is there that the general possibility of the exploitation crisis as contradictory practices between classes lies, it is there that the particularisation process of the terms of the contradiction in their activity as subjects lies, there that their own action and reciprocal implication lie.

However, the position of the capital in relation to the whole is different from the proletariat's. This difference is a consequence of the very content of exploitation. The capital is the agent of the general reproduction. A cycle of struggles is not a collection of struggles brought about by causality by a certain stage of the development of the capital. What appears as a causality relation that goes from the state of the capital to the struggles of the proletariat and that explains their content and historical evolution, is only an effect of the subsumption of work under the capital. It is true that the definition of a cycle of struggles always has, as a starting point, the valorisation process in its historical content and aspect. But we cannot deduce from there a causality relation, it would be not to understand what a totality is and its necessary particularisation in a non symmetrical position of its terms in relation to the renewing of the relation of the whole. A causality relation makes of the specific situation of the proletariat in the relation of the whole, something changing and liable to be influenced and from this, in spite of appearances, does not conceive it as essentially historical, that is to say essentially as the other term of a relation, but as a historically determined revolutionary nature.

To conceive essentially the situation and the practice of the proletariat as the other term of a relation, of a contradictory relation that constitutes a particularised totality, is to conceive them in a dynamic and historical

process, for it is simultaneously to conceive the two contradictory terms and thus a process. To establish a causality relation between the capital (brought back to objective conditions) and the practice of the proletariat can only produce an object on which this causality will act, that is to say a revolutionary nature that this causality will modulate. At this level, the theoretical production of the concept of cycle of struggles plays a part as an element of the overcoming of programmatism in as much as it is the criticism of a simple relation of causality between the practice of the proletariat and the objective conditions and as a corollary of a separation of the terms that leaves the possibility of a victory of the proletariat which would be its liberation, its affirmation.

Thus the first elements of definition that emerge from this first point make clear that a cycle of struggles is the specific practice of the proletariat in a relation of reciprocal implication with the capital as particularisation of a same totality, a specific practice that such a production immediately and essentially defines as historical and not as “historically brought about”. The overcoming of the capitalist mode of production is not the result of the contradiction process as undifferentiated unit, but of the activity of one of its terms: the proletariat. This term is able to produce this overcoming only because it is a particularisation of the whole and not because it could carry within itself a revolutionary essence.

2) THE CONCEPT OF CYCLE OF STRUGGLES LIES ON THE IDENTITY BETWEEN WHAT MAKES THE PROLETARIAT A REVOLUTIONARY CLASS AND A CLASS OF THE CAPITALIST MODE OF PRODUCTION.

Still starting from the first great defining principle of a cycle of struggles, exploitation. The non separation of what makes the proletariat a revolutionary class and its definition as a class of the capitalist mode of production derives from it as a determination of this principle.

As particularisation of the whole, the two terms of the contradiction do not entertain the same relation with this whole. The constitutive contradiction of this whole, exploitation, defines itself as the subsumption of work under the capital. In front of salaried work, the capital subsumes the living work, as such, it is the agent of the reciprocal reproduction of the two poles, as a consequence, there is no equality, no simple complementarity between the terms but a contradiction.

The subsumption of work under the capital implies that all the conditions of the renewing of the relation can be found, at the end of each cycle, reunited as capital in front of work (it's the economy). If work implies capital, it is because the first is always put by the latter in a position to involve it. Thus one cannot be content to say that the proletariat implies the capital and vice versa the capital implies the proletariat, because of the very content of this implication, exploitation, it does not have in the two ways the same "form". The proletariat implies the capital because it exists only as continually put by the capital in the position of having to involve it. The capital is the agent of general reproduction, the two terms are not on an equal footing, exploitation and subsumption are there and this makes the reciprocal implication a non symmetrical relation.

With the inequality of the terms of the contradiction in relation to the whole, it is as a form the very content of the contradiction that is found again. The proletariat is in contradiction with the necessary social existence of its work, as capital, autonomised value in front of it, and staying so only as increasing value: the fall of the profit rate is a contradiction between the classes. The very movement of accumulation constantly brings the surplus value back to the produced and transmitted value. Through the fall of the profit rate, the exploitation of the proletariat and the production of surplus value reach as their own limit the very social existence of work as producer of value and the accumulation of this value. The specification of the terms of this contradiction and the very shape of this contradiction with

the inequality of its terms define a class that is constantly contradictory to the development and to the reproduction of the totality that defines and involves it. What we have here is the daily struggle as well as, following the rules of the game, the possibility of its abolition. In the fall of the profit rate, the proletariat is constantly in contradiction with the totality of the conditions accumulated in front of it as value, this contradiction exists as the very form of contradiction, we can then define what the proletariat is, as a situation in a relation and not as a nature any longer. The concept of cycle of struggles is in itself a criticism of programmatism, it overtakes the rigid opposition between what makes the proletariat a revolutionary class and what defines it as a class of the capitalist mode of production.

Proletariat produces communism against capital which means that it is the subject of this overcoming, not as an executioner or as a midwife, but as a pole of the contradiction itself. If, beginning with the exploitation, we anchor what makes the proletariat a revolutionary class in what defines it as a class of the capitalist mode of production, that is to say in its implication with the capital, a necessary link between the daily course of the class struggle and revolution, this link considered as a historical phase is a cycle of struggles. In the concept of class struggles the ambivalence between a proletariat that would be a “revolutionary force that runs” and a proletariat that should overtake what it is in the capitalist mode of production to be revolutionary is overtaken. However, to give a correct rendition of the nature of this link and process, it is necessary to go through the second great principle around which the concept of cycle of struggles revolves : revolution and communism are historical productions as far as their content is concerned. This means that defining the concept of cycle of struggles is defining a succession of cycle of struggles. This second great defining principle is eventually only an extension of the first ; if exploitation is the contradiction between the proletariat and the capital,

this contradiction is thus simultaneously the dynamic of the capitalist mode of production, it is history.

II. REVOLUTION AND COMMUNISM ARE HISTORICAL PRODUCTIONS THROUGH THE CYCLES OF STRUGGLES

It is necessary to simultaneously historicise and specify each cycle of struggles and to understand the way they follow on from each other, to understand for example, the specificity of the current cycle of struggles and to refer, even if it is in a necessarily critical way, to the whole history of the proletariat and to the production of communism. It is, at each time, in each cycle of struggles, the whole course of the capitalist mode of production that has communism as its resolution. Revolution and communism as we define them now (communisation and social immediacy of the individual) are not an invariant, a norm that would run through the history of the capitalist mode of production under multiple avatars. The current cycle of struggles, along with the definition and the production of communism it contains, is, in itself, the necessary overcoming produced by the previous cycles. History cannot be rewritten backwards. In the current cycle of struggles, the production of communism becomes a historical axis running through the whole mode of capitalist production, this production is a succession and a totalisation of the cycles of struggles.

The analysis in terms of cycles of struggles helps to understand how the proletariat produces communism against the capital, this production can be found, for example, in the various stages of the programme (1790-1848 ; 1848-1871 ; 1871-1914), there are the internal contradictions of these stages, it is the affirmation of the class that is always carrying its impossibility in its own terms, through what programmatism historically is (its necessary explosion in trends, its relation to counter-revolution, etc.), it is eventually, the fact that class affirmation is never seen as an end in itself, and this turns out against it.

The impossibility of the programmatic revolution lies in its necessity to be simultaneously an increase in importance of the class in the capital, and an autonomous affirmation of the proletariat. The two terms contradict each other but can remain linked until the years 1870-1880. But as soon as the process of shifting to real subsumption genuinely begins, their coexistence becomes impossible. One can keep promoting revolution only through abstracting the reinforcement of the class from the capital; and on the other side, one will only be able to keep promoting the development of the class within the capitalist mode of production through making socialism an organized capitalism. One could develop the same reasoning about the old cycle of struggles that ended in the middle of the 70's by understanding its impossibility through the theoretical and practical implication between self-organisation and self-negation, autonomy and refusal of work.

The point here is neither to make each last cycle of struggles the norm of the previous cycles nor to consider the cycle in which we are as having, in an isolated way, communism as its resolution.

Each cycle of struggles constitutes a specific totality from its determinations, and from the way revolution and communism are defined from the historical stage of the contradiction between proletariat and capital it expresses. However, the succession of the cycles of struggles does not appear as a juxtaposition of exclusive totalities : there is a progression, an overcoming of the limits of a previous cycle in the specificity of a new cycle. At the same time a new cycle is the overcoming of a previous one, it constitutes the characteristics, the shape, the determinations of it in terms of limits, contradictions, and through this manifests that in itself this previous cycle can be analysed as producing, carrying, and calling for its overcoming in a relation, necessary but mediated by the next cycle with communism as this last cycle defines it. The characteristics of the previous cycles carry then, in the understanding (that became objective

and not a viewpoint) the following cycle provides, communism as it is defined by this cycle. The error would be to forget the analysis's starting point, to forget the reality of the current cycle and to consider that the previous cycle carries communism outside the existence of the current cycle. The mere present existence of this new cycle makes of this 'starting point' not a subjective viewpoint but an objective relation.

From cycle to cycle, the proletariat does not store up experiences that it could take advantage of to overcome the limits of a previous cycle. If a new cycle overcomes the limits of a previous cycle, it is because counter revolution, the capital restructuration, constituted the characteristics of this former cycle as limits. The fact that communism is contained by all the former cycles through what funds their own impossibility, through their internal contradictions, this fact is solved in counter revolution, capital restructuration and its development. Capital is not a mere obstacle. It is up to – through its own development, because it is a contradiction in process – solve a contradiction carrying communism as its overcoming. Thus, the historical significance of the capital links in one single historical movement the various and specific cycles of struggles and makes of each stage of the contradiction between proletariat and capital the overcoming of the previous cycle's limits. The impossibility in its own terms of each cycle of struggles up until now is the corollary of the ability of the capital to solve in its development a contradiction that carries communism. If counter revolution is a relevant answer to revolution, it is because the development of the capital is the obsolescence of the value in act. For the next cycle, this restructuration becomes a necessary mediation for revolution and communism.

The 1917 Russian proletarians acted as such as did the 1919 German, the 1936 Spanish, and the 1968 French or Italian. They led the revolutionary movements or the rebellions that were not theirs with full awareness, and in all their contradictions. None of their actions were contingent for them, the

limit of their movement were imposed on them by the counter revolution they had to fight, it was not, for them, an external limit that they could not overcome, but the very nature of their struggle. What we can say now of these movements, we say it now, and if we say why these movements were beaten we owe it to the struggles as they were led and to the counter revolution that crushed them (counter revolutions are also and above all our relation to the past revolutions). Our analysis is a result, the result did not pre exist in the object. For us now, the whole importance of these revolutions lies in what appears to us as their inner contradictions, in their impossibility as it occurred in the very terms these struggles existed and were lived in. It is through all that is, pragmatically and theoretically, for us now the impossibility of the programmatic revolution that we relate to the history of past struggles and to the continuity of theoretical production. It is the reason why we are led to give prominence to peripheral currents or to “heretical” opinions, for, within them, it was the criticism on its own bases, included in itself, of the revolution as affirmation of the proletariat and liberation of work that existed and not the potential or embryonic existence of the revolution as it appears now. It is what relates us to these movements, what makes them our living heritage. The whole history of the capitalist mode of production did not have in mind to produce the current situation, but the current situation allows to consider as its own condition for existence the whole past history, to understand the current cycle of struggles as an overcoming and resolution of the previous cycles. We are looking neither for lessons nor ancestors.

The problem of the role and activity of the capital in relation to communism as the overcoming of its contradiction with the proletariat is important because it is the one of the relation between revolution and counter revolution. It establishes this relation in the development of the capital as a historical process and cycles of struggles. If capital is a contradiction in process as is developed by Marx in *Grundrisen*, and if

its development is the production of the material conditions able to make the cramped basis work value is burst, it is not its obituary that is then described, it is simultaneously its strength and its historical meaning. It is because it is this contradictory process that undermines itself that capital has a historical significance but then to have a historical significance is, in the very content of its development (“the stealing of someone else’s work on which current wealth is based appears as a paltry basis confronted to the new basis, created and developed by the big industry itself”, Grundrisse, vol.2, p.222), to be able to impose, in front of the revolutionary class, its own reproduction and accumulation as an answer having a historical meaning in front of revolution, and taking place on its limits. The value’s obsolescence is the very dynamic of the capitalist mode of production.

The principle of all restructuration consists in – for the capital – being able to lay its own contradiction with the proletariat as a contradiction with its previous development as a limited one. It is a movement of transformation between proletariat and capital into multiple inner contradictions of the capital as pole of the relation.

Communism is not the historical product of each cycle of struggles, but of their succession (the concept of cycle of struggles is necessarily a succession of cycles of struggles), a succession that, through counter revolutions, restructurations and through the historical significance of the capital, is an overcoming and a “totalisation” – conservation and overcoming.

Each new cycle cannot conceive that previous cycles gave to revolution and communism the same content it does under different forms, it only understands itself as the result of a necessary history in relation to communism. Being itself the proof of the historical significance of the capital, each new cycle understands the defeat of the previous cycle as necessary and thus understands, taking itself as starting point, that the previous cycles had their impossibility in their own terms. Each new

cycle is the objective existence of what it, itself, defines as revolution and communism as being the outcome of the previous cycles.

The previous cycles did not define communism as a social immediacy of the individual. The point here is not to rewrite history backwards. However the current cycle of struggles is a historical result. Revolution as communisation (communist measures) and communism as social immediacy of the individual are the result of the overcoming of the previous cycles of struggles and allows to understand their limits and their contradictions in the very terms of these previous cycles. The succession of the cycles of struggles is not a juxtaposition but a totalising overcoming.

From the current cycle of struggles, one understands the production of communism as a historical trend running through the whole history of the capitalist mode of production. One does not give goals and contents they never had to previous stages, but the content of this cycle is the historical result and true understanding and appropriation of previous cycles, their revolutionary resurrection, their overcoming-integration.

III A CYCLE OF STRUGGLES IS THE LINK BETWEEN THE DAILY COURSE OF CLASS STRUGGLE AND REVOLUTION

The daily course of class struggle is not an incompleteness or a waiting, as accumulation of capital is not an obstacle. The relation of the daily course to revolution is a production one. To separate the two means that one considers all the course before the revolution as an accumulation of necessary conditions, mystifications, errors, insufficiency, mere integration of the proletariat or as unlucky attacks of a constantly revolutionary proletariat just as constantly beaten. Between the previous course of class struggle and revolution, there never was a “transgrowth” relation, mainly with the real subsumption of work under capital when the reproduction and the defense of the proletarian condition, although contradictory and antagonistic, are integrated within the own cycle of the capital.

One can only correctly place the relation between the daily course of class struggle and revolution, by defining proletariat both and identically as a class of the mode of capitalist production and as a revolutionary class, as well as revolution and communism as historical production. To define the course of class struggle as cycles of struggles is to understand this relation for it is historical and not normative. Each cycle of struggles is this relation's dynamic process.

To link the previous course of class struggle to revolution is to understand revolution as a rupture, an overcoming of a previous situation, but a produced rupture and made necessary by this previous situation through a specific historical development in which each term has its activity, its situation and its own responsibility as regards this overcoming. The point is, in each cycle of struggles, to show how class struggle comes up against its own limits and gives revolution a historically determined content.

The theoretical link between the daily course of class struggle and revolution can be found in the constantly contradictory situation proletariat is in relation to the necessary social form of its work as a value accumulated in front of it, and remaining thus only through developing itself, as capital. This contradiction is, for capital, its own dynamic. Subsuming work through this contradiction : exploitation, it constantly is the agent of the general reproduction of the relation and all the reproduction conditions can thus constantly be found as capital in front of work. Thus the daily course of class struggle is limited essentially and not externally by a resistance of the capital. This daily course comes up against its own limits in its contradiction with capital, but by so doing, it also produces them as such and calls for their overcoming and its own. The daily course of class struggle is a movement which, against the capital, calls for its overcoming, because if it comes up against its own limits it is because capital subsumes contradiction in its own cycle, it is its own dynamic. This process thus becomes the one of the inner contradictions of the capitalist accumulation

process. This the reason why we must go through economy, for the daily course of class struggle does not call for its overcoming because of an inner process but through the crisis of the capital. The development of the capital resulting from each of these cycles replaces the proletariat in its specific situation in front of the accumulation of all the conditions of reproduction. This is what links the daily course of class struggle to the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production. What we have here is a class that is constantly, and in its own definition, contradictory with the development that includes it, a development that finds in its very contradiction its dynamic – the whole problem is there.

The concept of cycle of struggles synthetises the daily course of class struggle and the contradiction between proletariat and capital as a dynamic of the capitalist mode of production and the historical production of revolution.

When Marx talks about the proletariat as being the midwife of the new society, one is still in the problematic in which proletariat comes to reveal something that is produced as an objective course. It is the whole development towards communism that needs to be understood as coming from the specific position of the proletariat in the contradiction, and not from this specific position, as executioner or midwife that is to say as a result of the process. The contradictions of this process would be limited therefore to the ones of capitalist accumulation, an accumulation understood in an objective way, an accumulation of the conditions that would be a purgatory that one had to go through. If the crisis of the social relation of exploitation – which is in itself an economic crisis – is the only social relation in which, for each cycle, its overcoming can occur. There is here, in the current cycle, a new relation between the struggles and their limits compared to the previous cycles. These limits can no longer be found in the counter revolutionary movement of the dynamics of the new cycle of struggles in the capital restructuration, but they become

intrinsic to the whole course of the cycle, constantly present as such. The reproduction of capital has become the specific limit of this cycle in relation to its immediate characteristics and not in itself through the tautological relation alone according to which there is no revolution if capital reproduces itself. Of course, the limits of the previous cycles only went with the reproduction of capital, but this reproduction was not in itself the historically specified limit of the cycle of struggles, which is now the case. To act as a class now is: on the one hand, to have capital and the categories of its reproduction as only perspective, on the other hand, it is for the same reason to be in contradiction with its own class reproduction.

The concept of cycle of struggles bears the relation between immediate struggles and revolution within each cycle of struggles. It makes each term of the contradiction a subject by giving them their autonomy within their reciprocal implication (and through the latter as well). In this daily course, it is important to define what makes it a dynamic process calling for its own overcoming, to find in the daily struggles the reason why they come up against their own content which is then constituted as limits in the opposition to the capital. To confer activity, vitality, and autonomy to each term of the contradiction, to establish a link between daily struggles and revolution, to define the production of revolution and of communism as historical compel one to understand the movement as a succession of cycles of struggles and to make the difference – in these cycles of struggles and even if all the elements make a whole – between what calls for overcoming, what is a reversal in the capital, and what establishes the content of these struggles as limits through making it stable.

Intervention and the communising current

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Despite its title, this discussion note does not deal with the question of intervention as such, but rather with the social becoming of the key-concept of our theory: communisation. That is to say with the formation of a situation in which we must envisage that a form of intervention is possible, with all the reservations that the use of this term calls for, when it means an action coming from outside into a framework that welcomes it or rejects it. It does not mean that we should dismiss all the work that has to be done around the affirmation of a revolutionary theory, its diffusion, the formation on this basis of more or less stable nuclei and the activity of these nuclei. However, to this term “intervention”, we must prefer the description of the activity of the advocates of communisation who are engaged in class struggles and the conflicts and gaps that run through them.

This activity takes place in the everyday course of class struggle that produces concretely and in reality its own overcoming as communist revolution. These activities must be understood as produced in this course, as constituting one of its practical determinations, one of its elements, and this in its theoretical characteristics themselves (in the narrow sense of the term “theoretical”). This theory production does not exist in itself as a constituted body, facing this immediate course and being prior to it, and that is the reason why theory must be understood as a real element of class struggle. The situation that arises from the restructuring is such that there is no longer any basis for the affirmation of the proletariat in order to liberate productive labour. Immediate labour (the only one that produces surplus-value) is no longer the essential element of the

process of labour, even if it remains, and will always remain, essential to the production process as the production of surplus-value. There no longer is a distinct workers' identity that faces capital and is confirmed by it. Now, the social existence of the proletariat faces, and keeps facing it as being capital itself. The contradiction between the proletariat and capital is then immediately contradiction with its own nature as a class of capital, the relation to capital that defines the proletariat as a class appears as a constraint exerted by capital.

The overcoming of capital is unitarily the abolition of classes, and therefore of the proletariat, in the abolition of capital, in the communisation of society which is thus abolished as a community separated from its members. Society is the community separated from its members, it is always a class society embodied in the ruling class. The abolition of the ruling class, of the class of capital, is the abolition of the state and of the society it represents as the State of Capital. Proletarians abolish capital by producing against it a community that is immediate to its members. They turn into immediately social individuals, with immediate inter-individual and trans-individual relations. In these relations between singular individuals and affinity groups each is no longer the embodiment of a social category, even the so-called natural categories, in reality given by society, such as the social genders of man and woman. The abolition of classes, the abolition of society is also immediately the abolition of its sexual division: male domination is assigned to some as men, who mediate the capitalist exploitation of the reproductive capacity of half the population, that is, the production of labour power ; and assigned to others as women. The abolition of classes is the abolition of men and women as assigned social functions.

This revolutionary process is the communisation, the production of communism without any other transition than the revolution itself. There are no stages between the revolution and communism: neither socialism nor

any form of workers' power or stable workers' management. The current situation of the relation between classes is the product of the totality of the historical process of capital: as exploitation, as mode of production, as economy, as capitalist society, as State, that is to say as a permanent contradiction (exploitation), irreducible and always deepening, between the capitalist class and the proletariat. In previous cycles of struggle, the proletariat, in its reciprocal implication with capital, would produce the communist overcoming in a manner that was adequate to the content of its contradiction with capital. This revolution, even if it was impossible in its own terms, was the real overcoming, and its impossibility is only obvious from the standpoint of the overcoming that is now produced by the contradiction between classes. With the appearance of the current situation, the proletariat no longer opposes to capital the positivity that capital confirmed: to be the class of productive labour. The proletariat used to project its affirmation by having as a programme a historical stage of the free development of productivity and thus of the caducity of value. This transitory stage to communism was the necessary integration, by the proletariat and under its control, of the becoming of the historical arch of capital. This period could well be conceived of as a Workers State (for the Marxists) or as a management by the commune or the union (for the anarchists), this does not change anything of the essential. The impossibility of integrating the arch of capital was the impossibility of self-exploitation, as exploitation is always a relation between distinct classes.

Very quickly, in Russia, after a few attempts at self-management, a new exploiting class came to being from the revolutionary structures, because the bourgeoisie had been expelled but productive labour still had to be developed. It was a counter-revolution adequate to a programmatic revolution, not less bloody or barbaric than a more obvious bourgeois counter-revolution. It is because of the nature of this counter-revolution that the Ultra-left was unable to see that what it called State Capitalism

was in fact really socialism. Indeed, this specific counter-revolution did not restore private property, it solved the problem of the impossibility of workers' self-exploitation by inventing an exploitation carried out by a workers' state and its class, the Party, slightly open to workers' promotion. It is this completely specific type of capitalist development that explained why a large part of the working class of western bourgeois capitalist countries was attached to it. This "programmatic" form (it could have been said "labourist" in English if there was not a pre-emption of the Labour Party) of class struggle is now globally overcome (together with its counter-revolution) and the horizon is now totally and simply capitalist. "Real socialism" (which was really socialism, that is to say a capitalist economy, run by the state, with a workers' ideology and a non-free labour market) collapsed with the restructuring of the real domination in which it no longer had its place. It appeared that real domination was directly antagonistic to its a-priori <realignment/equalization> [péréquation] and its absence of a labour market. As Socialism was all the same articulated to worldwide free-market capitalism, the global restructuring got rid of it, and its disappearance was so sudden that it gave the astonishing impression that it had evaporated under the suns of Chernobyl and Afghanistan to get lost in the darkness of Reagan's "Star Wars".

This disappearance, and the concomitant disappearance of the workers movement, have immortalized capital in the field of economy and society, the only temporal field that can exist until their abolition. In this immortalization, Radical Democratism has at the same time buried and replaced programmatism by placing class struggles in front of their own limit (en renvoyant aux luttes de classe leur propre limite): for the proletariat, its own existence as a class is the limit that its struggle as a class must overcome. Radical Democratism is then the construction, for themselves, of the real limits of struggles as a set of demands and of "solutions" to the problems of capital: demanding capital to be adequate to

its ideology that advocates democracy and social equality, total democracy, fair-trade and sustainable development. Even if Radical Democratism has probably reached the peak of its existence between 1995 and 2003, it still constitutes an obstacle that struggles will have to shatter. The current characteristic of the contradiction between classes, which is to not allow the existence of a (socialist) “beyond” to capital within the present of capital, posits at the same time its immortalisation and the determination of its abolition.

The fact that class struggles have demands can not be overcome on its own basis. In the crisis of the relation of exploitation, the seizing of capital units is an immediate survival necessity, and it implies developing the self-management of other elements that are themselves essential to the survival of what was first seized. This movement makes it a necessity to continue to struggle, it becomes its own aim as a continuation of the struggle.

The expansion, through conflicts, within and against capital, of the seizing of all sorts of elements of the capitalist society, this development of self-management contradicts itself, as self-management, because of the development within itself of an overcoming of exchange, by making free and uniting the seized elements. A community of proletarians who do not want to remain so constitutes itself, and, through the struggle, they become immediately social singular individuals. Self-management, self-organisation, overcome themselves and become communisation: they go beyond themselves when they refuse any stabilisation that would consist in creating a state-run economy or a crisis economy that would potentially be counter-revolutionary. This overcoming is an internal struggle at the same time as been a struggle against the capitalist society.

The communisation is a revolution within the revolution.

It is the proletarians’ struggle for their unity in the struggle, struggle in which they cease to be proletarians! Communisation is not the re-

appropriation of individual capitals by proletarians, they do not re-appropriate anything, capitals are radically de-capitalized, they are not property any more, they are de-objectified as capital, as reification of social relations, they return to their eventual use as means of living and/or of the extension of the decapitalisation.

The real communisation is not the practical application of an abstract theoretical anticipation. The concept of communisation is not an intellectual invention corresponding to a practical social situation that would be dumb and unbearable, it is the product of the self-critical understanding that struggles have on themselves, struggles that, since the 60s, show the end of the programme, as proletarians no longer express any desire to affirm themselves through the state. Struggles also show through changing activities, riots, strikes that have no demands in the 70s, activities of gaps and riots again in the 90s and the 2000s, the active refusal – against capital – of the proletarian condition, including within self-management.

The elaboration of the theory of communisation took place at the beginning of the crisis faced by the capitalist mode of production at the end of the 60s and at the start of the counter-revolutionary process that was the restructuring of capital from the early 70s. It is the overcoming of the contradiction in which the Ultra-left was stuck, criticizing the forms of the affirmation and rise to power of the proletariat (mass party, union, use of the parliament) while retaining the revolution as an affirmation of the class. It is also the overcoming of the dead-end of workers' autonomy in the 60s/70s, fortunately less bloody. The partial and formal critique of the Ultra-left that still advocates direct affirmation through workers' councils radicalises itself into a theory of the self-negation of a theoretical proletariat that is still considered revolutionary in its nature, a theoretical, revolutionary proletariat that is clearly distinct from the alienated working class, that could only be seen defending wage labour. As the restructuring proceeded and working class identity was disappearing, this conception of

a proletariat/working class contradiction lead to a giving up of the idea of a revolutionary nature of the proletariat, even hidden behind the working class. The proletariat/ working class contradiction was a transitory way to escape the impossibility of the affirmation of the class, and this pure struggle of concepts implied that the nature of the proletariat could only manifest itself by destroying all the forms of existence of the class in the capitalist society, a class that could even be called “variable capital”.

Any affirmation of a revolutionary nature, even under the form of the affirmation of a pure negativity, is overcome when the revolution, that is the production of communism, is the very means of the destruction of capitalism and of the abolition of the classes. In this production, no nature of the proletariat expresses itself, only the contradiction between classes is at work; communism is produced against capital, simply because it is consciously necessary for the struggle against exploitation and the crisis of exploitation itself. A coherent critique of capital that includes its historical process is now inseparable from the affirmation of a communising perspective. This critique that systematises the content of the gaps in the limit of struggles argues with left-wing anarchists and immediatist advocates of communism. The theory of the communisation that is to come, that is, an overcoming of proletarians’ self-defence against capital as it endangers their immediate reproduction, does not arise as a solution, as a strategic choice that proletarians should make.

The communising perspective exists as a means for the self-understanding of the movement that overcomes defensive struggles that are simply socialising. Now this perspective is simply a reinforcing of the activities that posit this overcoming by criticizing workers’ self-organisation and self-management of the economy. The communising perspective is an articulation between the theorising nature of struggles and “theory” production in a narrow sense. It is in this situation that a possibility for an epidemic expansion of the concept of communisation exists.

Carrying on the elaboration of a communising perspective implies recognising that it should become inescapable for all sorts of advocates of a revolution, and even, as radical democrats modestly call it, of a social transformation. The revolutionary workers' programme does not exist any more; Radical Democratism was its disappearance and what remained as a political (or pseudo-political) form from the limit of struggles. In this cycle, the articulation with immediate struggles must therefore be understood from the following theoretical elements:

Theory as a real element of struggles

The theoretician nature of struggles

The formation of gaps in the class characteristic of struggles, that is to say in their limit, identical to their very nature of class being

The appearance of a communising theoretical current

The production of an overcoming during the totality of the cycle that started in the 70s

The overcoming as not being an overgrowth (*transcroissance*) from struggles, necessitating a rupture

To understand the economical crisis as a crisis of the relation of exploitation, as a crisis of class reproduction

The synthesis element could be the existence of the communising current.

We can probably link the action of the advocates of communisation with the appearance of gaps, without considering them as triggers but rather as gaps "hunters". The situation implies the formation of gaps in struggles: communisators have, by nature, affinities with these potentialities.

It is impossible to think that communisation could take place without being given a name. The hegemonic becoming of the concept is by no means a condition for communisation, as it is determined by the revolutionary crisis of the relation of exploitation. However, the process

of a communising overcoming will see the concept spread, in a conflicting way, within struggles and within self-organisation. Already now, there is a conflict between what the communisation current holds and the fossilized remains of the councilist-bordiguist ultra-left. True, these remains are insignificant but there is also, if not an argument, at least a polemic with an immediatist- alternativist current that is far less negligible. The hegemony of the concept now requires a self-critical analysis of current struggles rather than the already overcome critique of the programme.

This argument and this polemic are not intended to popularise the concept, which concerns the meaning of struggles, the meaning of the development of capital, the outcome of struggles in the coming crisis. However, they spread the concept and it can become integrated in numerous a-priori revolutionary schemes. It can be synonymous with collectivisation, with self-management (believe me, I have seen it!) It can be synonymous with the constitution of proletarians' unity in struggle. Proletarians in struggle create between themselves new relations whose mediation is the struggle against the mediation, that is, capital. To call this unity in struggles communisation means, for those you do it, that they understand the direct link between current struggles and the revolution, and that is essential. But this link has here an immediatist characteristic, it autonomises the dynamic of the period, and constructs its ideology, which inevitably leads to an alternative lifestyle. And it is not this lifestyle that we should criticize, but rather the interventionist posture that results from it. The more or less immediatist tendencies will be wrong until they are right, but then everybody will know it! The term communisation has also been considered as clearer than anarcho-syndicalism, without seeing how they are in opposition with each other. The term can function as a political label, and it will be assigned to all those who speak about communisation, they will be communisators as one can be trotskist or ultra-leftist, that is how it is and we must "live with it".

The development of the concept, that the communising current undertakes permanently, is also the development of a network of small groups and individualities which is not homogeneous and which includes differences of opinion. Even more different will be, as we have seen, the re-appropriations of the concept beyond this network. The differences of opinion, or even the contradictions, in the understanding of the concept, which refers to the positive abolition of capital by the proletarians who turn into immediately sociable individuals, are inevitable but they do not bring with them any possibilities that the real communisation would “take the wrong track”, because the concept does not create the movement: it is a necessary self-understanding of the movement. The communising current develops in relation with struggles (whatever the form this relation takes), its concepts are used in order to integrate these struggles to a perspective, this use leads to differences of opinion and to interpretations that can be immediatist, alternativist, ideological or incredibly productive!

The theory of the communisation, in its relation with class struggle, produces the water in which it swims, it is the banal becoming of this theory that is already a real element of struggles and that will allow it to become, more and more, the critical theory of struggles that are more and more theoretician. The spreading of the communisation concept will be the unification of two forms of theory and will allow it to have a common language. This spreading will give rise to polemics and to the emergence of a possible expression of an overcoming perspective that will no longer be, as it is the case now, an implicit that must be deciphered.

Let us be prepared to be surprised and disturbed by the success of the communisation.

The Glass Floor

THIS TEXT IS THE INTRODUCTION FOR THE BOOK, LES EMEUTES EN GRÈCE, SENONEVERO, 2009.

The riots⁷ (or the riot, spread out and fragmented in time and space) which broke out in Greece following the murder of the young Alexander on the evening of 6th December 2008, are productive of theory. They are practically – that is to say consciously – the self-understanding of this cycle of struggles in its current phase – they are a theoretical and chronological landmark. With all its limits, this movement is the first proletarian reaction (albeit non-global) to the crisis of restructured capital. In terms of its production of theory, this movement can be considered, more or less arbitrarily, according to six essential characteristics:

The praxis and discourse of these riots make of the current crisis of capitalist reproduction a crisis of the future of this mode of production. The characterisation, in a topology of the reproduction of capitalist social relations, of the moment of oppression and coercion in the self-presupposition of capital.

7 The Greek term εξέγερση [ekseyersi] was widely used by the participants themselves to describe what was going on, this term can be translated as “uprising”, “rebellion”, “insurrection”, “riot”. “Unrest” is too neutral; “rebellion” does not imply any specific forms of action; “insurrection” is too strong for what really happened in Greece, as what was at stake was never to overthrow the power in place and the relations of production it expresses: there was neither the will, nor the possibility to do such a thing. “Riot” corresponds to the practical form of the uprising, to its spontaneous character and to the “rebellion” as refusal that manifested itself in it.

The question of whether the rioters had a “peripheral” character in relation to a “core” of the working class, that is to say the question of the unity of the class and of its recomposition.

The overcoming of what was the contradictory dynamic of the anti-CPE movement in France, and this bears some relation to the second point. The overcoming in the struggle of the objectivity of the course of capital and the activities of the classes involved as choices, decisions, tactics, and strategies.

The questioning of the theory of value and of the crisis of the capitalist mode of production in the light of an attack of capital outside of production and the spreading of practices of sabotage.

(some points have been gathered under one chapter)

1. THE FUTURE

We can obviously refer to all the analyses of the permanent crisis of the educational system in Greece (and the recurrence of the struggles that take place there): its increasingly unbearable selectivity, “the intensification of student labour”, the permanent lie about the opportunities it opens up, the fact that from being a “social elevator” it becomes a mere “reflection of injustices and of social cleavages”. Studying becomes purely and simply the acceptance (without compensation) of all the relations of exploitation that give their form and content to the global education system. It is necessary to call all this to mind, and TPTG’s text ‘The permanent crisis in education: On some recent struggles in Greece’ does this very well. But this is not enough – we have to go further. If, in many countries, education happens to be a particularly unstable and restless sector of capitalist society, it is not only because of the “reforms” that the reproduction of capital has imposed on this sector, but because it is the reproduction of capital that has become problematic. It is by becoming problematic, that is to say by being in crisis as reproduction, that the self-presupposition

of capital designates, at first, as the place for the crisis, sectors of society where its reproduction takes a specified form in relation to society itself. It affects primarily the “entrants”, and constructs the social category of youth. This crisis of reproduction is concentrated in places specialising in reproduction, designating the precarious youth as its principal actor (the 600 Euros generation) of which the students remained the principal representatives throughout the movement. It is in this regard that the student movement was this general movement of riots.

Some Greek texts, like those of TPTG and Blaumachen, speak about university as a “fraction of capital” and consider the universities as work places – and places of exploitation. Consequently, the blockade of universities is understood as a hindrance to general reproduction, if not to production tout court, to the extent that the student is considered as the producer of a specific commodity- her labour-power. In such an approach, we should distinguish between what is said and what is implied, that is to say of what such an analysis – theoretically false – is the true symptom.

Unless they are private universities in which particular capitals requiring at least the average profit rate are invested, and in which the student is a consumer who buys the lesson as a commodity, universities are not fractions of capital (even in this case, universities would not be a productive sector). They are an essential function of the production / reproduction of labour-power, but regardless of their utility, to the extent that – via the state – it is money as revenue that functions here, and regardless of the necessity of the rationalisation of their performance (the less the student dawdles in his studies, the less it costs), they are not capitalist companies, as for any faux-frais of production. In studying, the student (we are not speaking here about the fact that “being a student” has become a position on the labour market for precarious jobs: there are “student” jobs, whether they are held by students or not) does not enter into a relation of purchase-sale of their labour-power and produces no commodity containing a

surplus-value that her employer (the administration of the university) appropriates. The student must put a lot of herself into the production of her commodity – complex labour power – but she does not buy it from – nor sell it to – herself. As long as this commodity remains attached to his person, pure subjectivity, it does not enter any productive relation with capital. Even if we accepted the idea that the student manufactures a commodity, she would not be a productive worker (productive of capital), but at the most a petty independent producer bringing her commodity to market. We can here point out that this “left-wing idea” of the student as producer of a commodity is a recurring theme of the right-wing: each is the petty entrepreneur of their own person.

In the true self-understanding of the movement as anti-capitalist, what makes of it an anti-capitalist movement – the crisis of reproduction – produces a false self-understanding: the student is a productive worker, and the university is a capital. This “false” understanding is a true symptom of the situation which structures the “student” revolt. The movement did not construct itself as anti-repression, anti-government or anti-university-reform (and in this it breaks with the continuity of the student revolts in Greece). Indeed, in the school and university students’ revolt, it is really the reproduction of capitalist society which is at stake, which is the object of the contradiction. However, as such, this revolt is stuck – despite all the shows of sympathy and solidarity from the “population” – in the institutional forms of this reproduction, as a “breach of contract”, as the failure of a corrupted state under the close watch of the IMF and lying about its own functioning to the European Commission.

The capitalist mode of production itself has run out of future.

[What we have seen in Greece] is an original species of revolt, prefigured by earlier riots in Los Angeles, London and Paris, but arising from a new and more profound understanding that the future has been looted in advance. Indeed, what generation in modern history (apart from the

sons of Europe in 1914) has ever been so comprehensively betrayed by the patriarchs? [...] My “baby-boom” cohort bequeaths to its children a broken world economy, stupefying extremes of social inequality, brutal wars on the imperial frontiers, and an out of control planetary climate. (Mike Davis, *The betrayed generation*, interview given to a Greek magazine.)

If, in the Western capitalist area, the instances of sharper social conflicts are concentrated on the precarious youth (united in the riots in Greece, contrary to what happened in France in 2005 – 2006 between the banlieue riots and the anti-CPE struggle), it is because “youth” is a social construct. It is here that the link between the student movement and the riots lies, and in a totally immediate way, it is the labour contract which summarises this link. The crisis constructs and then attacks (in the same movement) the category of “entrants” depending on the modalities of their “entrance”: educational training, precariousness (and those who are in a similar situation- the migrants). The main thing here is the labour contract which places this labour power in its relation to capitalist exploitation at the level of the changing needs of the market, the mobility of capital, etc. It is something that can be seen, in a more or less violent way, everywhere in Europe and in the USA. It is the crisis of reproduction as such that annihilates the future and constructs the youth as the subject of social protest. The future, in the capitalist mode of production, is the constantly renewed reproduction of the fundamental capitalist social relation between labour-power and means of production as the principal result of capitalist production itself. The crisis of financialised capital is not simply the setting, the canvas, the circumstance underlying the riots in Greece: it is the specific form of the capitalist mode of production running out of future, and by definition it immediately places the crisis at the level of reproduction.

The transformation of the student movement into a generalised movement of proletarian riots which took as their target the reproduction of capital as such in what would make this reproduction possible (we will

see later that the limits of these riots lies here), that is to say the institutions, the state, the violence, the ideology, exchange, the commodity, has produced its actors from an already existing material. Since the Second World War, the development of capitalism in Greece has been chaotic, destroying previous social relations rather than constructing new ones that would involve and define the whole of society. A good example of this – the entry into the European Union – was, so far, the last step taking place. The Greek bourgeoisie has always shown a faintheartedness, placing it far behind the big capitalist powers (even since “independence”), and has looked more overseas than towards its own national territory. Greek capitalist industry, which first developed under the form of a couple of enclaves most often in the hands of foreign capital (as was the royal family), is now decrepit. Employment relies on the merchant navy, tourism and the construction sector that is linked to it, and administration. The revolt against a capitalism that never allowed it to live properly is intrinsic to Greek society.

The riots of December 2008 stand in the conjunction between this predatory capitalism whose organ is a state run by clientelist mafias, and the crystallisation, which this capitalism creates in the student movement, of a social defiance built from hatred and contempt. Because, in Greece, the student movement is a “social milieu” that largely goes beyond the situation of students and school children. In such a capitalism, the “margins” of the “600 Euros generation” can quickly come to represent the whole social functioning, especially when they are already organised, like in the Exarchia district in Athens, in a whole network of resistance and alternatives (social centres, printing-houses, cafés, associations, crafts, jumble sales, sewing workshops...), that is to say when they are massive and view capitalism and the state as one would a foreign army of occupation. The riots movement is not a student movement not only because the students and schoolchildren were immediately joined by a whole fraction

of the precarious and immigrant population, and benefited from the sympathy and occasional participation of a part of the population, but also because the student movement was already not a “student” movement. The student situation is a social and political situation; that is to say a conflictual relation to the state, which is at the same time a future exploiter (the administration is almost the only job opportunity opened) but also a potential exploiter, which by turning someone down condemns him to a social no man’s land. In this situation, produced by the very functioning of capitalism, the constraint and the exteriority of the capitalist social relation appear as a state, a point of departure, rather than as an activity (we can see here simultaneously the force and the limits of these riots). The production of one’s class belonging and of the capitalist social relation as an exterior constraint, which is an activity of the class within the relation itself, appear here as a state of exteriority whose only social foundation is violence. It should be noted that the “exteriority” to which we refer is intrinsic to a class activity which includes for the class, against capital, its own putting into question: we are absolutely not speaking here of a militant exteriority, of interventionism or activism. Whatever the specific limits of the movement considered here, it would be completely wrong to apply the schemes of the critique of militantism and interventionism to it.

Logically the targets of these riots were the institutions where the reproduction of the mode of production acquires a separated form, separated from the society of which they are the political, economic as well as ideological institutions of reproduction, as well as the forms of circulation in which capital returns to itself. When the future is already looted and when practically and consciously a movement takes place at this level of reproduction, even if the latter remains understood and attacked as structures separated from production, there can be no demands, because there is no longer any alternative and not even the illusion, like in Italy at the same time, that one can exist. It is in this crisis of the reproduction of

the social relations that, in the self-presupposition of capital, the moments of coercion and normality, of which the riots were not only the update but also practically the shaping, are fixed.

The police and the army are the last word in the self-presupposition of capital in the face of resistance to the provisions taken by the capitalist class in the spheres of work, social security (health, retirement...), and education. To be a precarious or migrant worker means, directly in the relation to work, that one must work whenever the boss needs it, must accept to work unpaid overtime and to be fired according to the vagaries of the moment. It also means being beaten up or attacked with acid for a single demand or even complaint. To be a precarious or migrant worker is already to live under a reign of terror, and for a “stable Greek” worker, the terror of work are the “incidents” whose multiplication corresponds to the intensification of exploitation. Absurdly, the wage and the reproduction of labour-power tend to become illegitimate for capital itself (cf “Revendiquer pour le salaire”, *Théorie Communiste* 22)⁸. This is the crisis of reproduction, the running out of future. It is also for the proletariat, in the very objectivity of capital, the reproduction of its

8 In restructured capitalism, the reproduction of labour power has been subjected to a double disjunction. On the one hand a disjunction between the valorisation of capital and the reproduction of labour power; and on the other hand a disjunction between consumption and wages as source of income. In this period of the capitalist mode of production, this double disjunction means that demands on wages are not only an obstacle to the maximum valorisation of capital but have also become structurally illegitimate. This is why demands on wages have become the field where the production of class belonging as an exterior constraint can be foreseen and this at its very core: the wage relation by which the physical/social existence of the proletariat depends on capital.

class belonging that becomes an exterior constraint in the very relation of exploitation that reproduces it as a class and links it inseparably, as a class, with capital. Everywhere in these riots a feeling is expressed that capital is in “breach of contract”: “Will we earn enough to be able to have children?”

The riots in Greece show the end of the period that started, in the current cycle, with the strike wave in 1995 in France and the “anti-summit” gatherings of the end of the 90s, that is to say the end of radical democratism⁹ as the expression and fixation of the limits of class struggle. No other future is possible, because there is no longer a future: the alternative is dead.

9 What we describe as radical democratism does not only designate an ideology (“citizenism”). It is also a praxis whose content consists in the formalisation and fixation of the limits of the current struggles in their specificity. The revolutionary dynamic of this cycle of struggle is at the very same time its intrinsic limit. The class has no longer any confirmation of its existence for itself in the face of capital. This means that the proletariat produces all of what it is, its whole existence in the categories of capital, and this is why it can abolish it. But radical democratism formalises also the whole limit of the struggles of this period: to fix the existence of the class in capital. All of this is very real in class struggle and there is a party of the alternative whose existence becomes the justification of its ideology. For radical democratism, the critique of the capitalist mode of production is limited to the necessity for the proletariat to control its conditions of existence. For this purpose, this social movement finds in the democracy that it calls radical the most general form and content of its existence and its action (management, control). The proletarian is replaced by the citizen and the revolution by the alternative. The movement is large: from forces which only demand an adjustment, capitalism with a human face, to alternative perspectives which see themselves as breaking with capitalism while remaining in a problematic of control and management.

Recall the anti-WTO demonstrations and the “Battle of Seattle” in 1999 which opened a new era of non-violent protest and grassroots activism¹⁰. The tremendous popularity of the World Social Forums, the millions-strong turnouts to protest Bush’s invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the widespread support for the Kyoto Accord – all augured enormous hope that an “alter monde” might yet be born. Meanwhile, the war did not end, greenhouse gas emissions soared, and the social forum movement has languished. An entire cycle of protest came to an end just as the Wall Street boiler-room of globalized capitalism exploded, leaving in its wake both more radical problems and new opportunities for radicalism. The revolt in Athens ends the recent drought of anger. Its cadre seems to have little tolerance for hopeful slogans or optimistic solutions, thus distinguishing itself from the utopian demands of 1968 or the wishful spirit of 1999. This absence of demands for reform (and, thus, any conventional handle for managing the protests), of course, is what is most scandalous, not the Molotov cocktails or broken shop windows. It recalls not so much the student left of the 1960s as the intransigent revolts of underclass

10 Mike Davis here forgets the importance of the clashes between the Black Blocks and the police in the importance and the dynamic of these counter-summits. If it does not change anything to the general analysis presented in this quotation, this lack prevents the understanding of the very contradictions of this period of radical democratism and therefore to understand that, in the current situation, are soon to be overcome both radical democratism and the autonomisation of the dynamic of this cycle of struggle, that is to say the putting into question of one’s class belonging as something to be realised in the face of capital rather than being intrinsic to the contradiction that is exploitation: in both cases another life was possible as an alternative.

anarchism in Montmartre in the 1890s or Barcelona's Barrio Chino during the early 1930s.¹¹

The lack of future lies not only in the disappearance of the promise of a better life, but also in the putting at stake of the possibility of being able to survive and to reproduce one's own body, as made of flesh and bones. And, wanted or not, proletarians are made of flesh and bones. This is not their fault: to be made of flesh and bones is a completely social constraint and a social condition, the proletarian is the first purely physical worker, a subjectivity without object (he has no objective or personal relation to any means of production or subsistence). When the proletariat is attacked in its physical constitution, it is its social definition which is at stake.

At the same time, the "slogans of hope" and "optimistic solutions" are still current in Italy. One can see in this dissonance a simple effect of the contrasting economic situations in Italy and Greece, where the degree of trust that investors have toward the state has just been downgraded. But tomorrow, Italy could be the scene of a wave of riots similar to Greece and Greece, the scene of a large movement pressing for reformist demands alongside the flowering of grass-roots collectives. We should keep in mind that class struggle is a global – but not homogeneous – process and that struggles do not take place on a chronological axis in which there would be "avant-garde movements" and "anachronisms". If the situation in which the proletariat acting as a class is in such a contradictory relation to capital that its struggle can be its own abolition, if this situation is the dynamic of this cycle of struggle, it stills develops itself in a chaotic manner. In some places, through wage demands that the capitalist mode of production neither can nor wants to fulfill, in others, through large self-organised grass-roots movements that propose alternatives, and in

11 Mike Davis, op.cit. http://www.flexmens.org/drupal/?q=Griots_De_rellen_in_Athene_als_vonk_die_het_vuur_doet_oplaaien

still others, through riots that produce one's class belonging as an exterior constraint and the relation of exploitation as a coercion pure and simple. Nobody is ahead of their time; nobody is backward, because nobody is independent.

All the same, in this chaos, all the terms are not identical and do not have the same relation to the dynamic of this cycle considered as a totality. The dynamic of this cycle is the swerve that some current practices create within what is the general limit of this cycle of struggles: to act as a class. Presently, the class activity of the proletariat is more and more torn in an internal way: as long as it remains the action of a class, it has capital as its sole horizon (because all liberation of work and affirmation of the proletariat as the dominant class have disappeared), simultaneously in its action against capital it is its own existence as a class that it faces and that it must treat as something to do away with. The majority of the current struggles have to live through this swerve, this internal split, and the riots in Greece did not escape it.

To act as a class entails a swerve towards oneself, to the extent that this action entails its own putting into question in relation to itself: the proletariat's negation of its existence as a class within its action as a class (and this is the swerve in the action as a class). In the riots in Greece, the proletariat does not demand anything and does not consider itself against capital as the basis for an alternative, it simply does not want to be what it is anymore.

At the same time, despite its larger scale, and the fact that it put into motion a large part of the working class, the Italian "Onda anomale" has to face – if only because of its simultaneity with the riots in Greece – its dead-ends, its lack of perspective. The riots in Greece mean that the Onda has no perspectives, does not point to the future of class struggle. Conversely, the very simultaneity of these struggles (Italian or Greek) give to these riots in Greece a meaning they would not have without this

simultaneity, that is of pointing out, in the fact of acting as a class, the very nature of the current limits of class struggle within itself considered as a whole.

This entanglement, as swerve, of the elements of class struggle already has a meaning: that of the putting into question by the proletariat of its existence as a class in its struggle against capital. In Greece, the principal content of this putting into question was to show and to shape the reproduction of social relations as including coercion.

2. THE MOMENT OF COERCION

Exploitation is not the content of a contradictory relation between two symmetrical terms (there would then be no contradiction); it is a difference of relation to the totality which, in view of its content, determines a term to call into question this totality and to overcome it. It is not exploitation in itself that contains its own overcoming, it is the specific situation and activity of the proletariat, as a pole implied by the capitalist mode of production as a totality, which contains and produces the overcoming of this totality.

Exploitation is the valorisation of capital in its three constitutive moments: the face-to-face between labour and capital, the subsumption of labour under capital, the transformation of surplus-value into additional capital. It is this third moment that we must particularly take into account. A crisis of reproduction is defined by the fact that the movement of the self-presupposition of capital, the “double mill” (“double moulinet”) of its reproduction¹², does not by itself return each component to its proper place.

12 “Capitalist production, therefore, of itself reproduces the separation between labour-power and the means of labour. It thereby reproduces and perpetuates the condition for exploiting the labourer. It incessantly forces him to sell his labour-power in order to live, and

The transformation of surplus-value into additional capital is never guaranteed: because of competition, obviously, at the most superficial level, and because this transformation implies the encounter between commodity capital and money as capital or means of circulation (this is the general possibility for crisis), but above all because it implies the underlying transformation of surplus-value into profit, thus the relation of the surplus-value to the total capital employed, and, in the renewing of the cycles of production, the rising organic composition of capital. The falling rate of profit is always the never guaranteed character of the transformation of surplus-value into additional capital, and therefore, of the renewing of the process. We are not talking here of a problem that would only concern individual capitals as such. If, indeed, the never

enables the capitalist to purchase labour-power in order that he may enrich himself. It is no longer a mere accident, that capitalist and labourer confront each other in the market as buyer and seller. It is the process itself that incessantly hurls back the labourer on to the market as a vendor of his labour-power, and that incessantly converts his own product into a means by which another man can purchase him. [in the French edition: C'est le double moulinet du procès lui-même, qui rejette toujours le premier sur le marché comme vendeur de sa force de travail et transforme son produit toujours en moyen d'achat pour le second] In reality, the labourer belongs to capital before he has sold himself to capital. His economic bondage is both brought about and concealed by the periodic sale of himself, by his change of masters, and by the oscillations in the market-price of labour-power. Capitalist production, therefore, under its aspect of a continuous connected process, of a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capitalist relation; on the one side the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer. (Capital, Volume 1, [chapter 23](#))

guaranteed character of this transformation of surplus-value into additional capital appears at the level of individual capitals, it is because there is competition, but that is not where its origin lies. If there is competition, it is because of the falling rate of profit. The never guaranteed character of the transformation-process of surplus-value into additional capital is a characteristic of social capital.

The fact that the transformation of surplus-value into additional capital is problematic is expressed as much by the transformations of capital, the bankruptcies, the lay-offs, the transformation of one part of the population into supernumeraries, as it is by the intensification of work, the transformation of the labour-process, the setting of the price of labour power. The transformation of surplus-value into additional capital is first and foremost the extraction of a surplus-value “sufficient” to allow this transformation to take place.

The capital-relation is a relation of compulsion (emphasis in the text), the aim of which is to extract surplus labour by prolonging labour time (Marx, Results of the Immediate Production Process)

Here lies the general possibility of a crisis of exploitation as contradictory practices between classes, here lies the process of particularisation of the terms of the contradiction in their activities as subjects, here lies their independence and reciprocal implication, here, in exploitation, lies coercion. The self-presupposition of capital is not an automatic movement which, as such, would be self-sufficient to put each one back in its place. The self-presupposition of capital is not the breathing of an automatic monster; it contains, as a function of itself, the action of the subjects of the contradiction. It is here that the relation of exploitation is coercion, as activity of the capitalist class and as activity of the proletariat which is a struggle against this “putting back in one’s place”. For the capitalist class this action embodies itself as State.

The capitalist mode of production, as it emerged from the restructuring, brings about a different organisation of space for the reproduction of capital and a different organisation of violence. The “margins” are no longer thrown back into the periphery but are everywhere integrated, at every levels of the reproduction. If the major result of the production process is the reproduction of the face-to-face between the proletariat and capital, it is not guaranteed that this face-to-face leads ipso facto to the first moment of exchange between capital and labour (the purchase and sale of labour power). The disciplining of labour-power, facing a proletarian that has become again, as proletarian, a poor, is everywhere on the agenda. The forms of intervention are disciplinary ones.

The relation of exploitation contains, in an immanent way, a direct relation of domination, of subjection, and of social and police control. But when one takes the relation of domination, of subjection, as the totality of the relation of exploitation, the part for the whole, then one loses sight of the relation of exploitation and of the classes. The moment of coercion taken as starting point and posited as the totality of the relation between the individual and society inevitably lapses into the point of view of the isolated individual and the critique of everyday life. That is to say that one loses sight of the structure that makes the isolated individual exist, and therefore contents oneself with having as a starting point what is in fact a result.

In certain conditions and configurations of class struggle, practices may arise which for themselves, depart from the other moments of exploitation. It is then fundamentally within the relation of exploitation, in practice, that the proletariat produces capital as coercion, as an exterior constraint within the class relation itself. At the same time, at the other pole of the contradiction, the reproduction of capital becomes corruption, racketeering, and nepotism. In a crisis of reproduction that, as in Greece, brings at the forefront as the foundation of society the institutional and business-

orientated bodies in charge of its reproduction, the self-presupposition of capital seems to have become crazy. What is nothing but coercion on one side appears as pure racketeering and corruption on the other. The “contract” is broken:

All this [people’s misery] takes place in the midst of a crazy dance of millions landing in priestly businesses [a reference to the land swap scandal of Mount Athos] and doped-up Olympic athletes who are paid extravagantly to “glorify the homeland”. Money that ends up in the pockets of the moneyed and powerful. From bribes to “compadres” and haggling of scandalous DVDs with corrupt journalists in order to cover-up government “scandals”. While dozens of lives are wasted in forest-fires to allow big capital to turn forests into tourist businesses and while worker deaths in construction sites and in the streets are dubbed “work accidents” (Leaflet, Nothing will ever be the same).

In Greece, the crisis of reproduction, the running out of future, has designated the sociological categories which are its actors (university and high-school students, second generation immigrants, precarious workers) and constructed the social category that is its synthesis: the youth.

It is the whole ambivalence of these riots: the putting into question of what one is comes not only from what one is (that comes without saying) but also makes from what one is the particular category that must express the general dissolution of existing conditions. As a police response, the answer of the State is not “inadequate”. The response of the state is at the level of this general content, the tight police control, comparable to that of an occupation army is a warning given to the precarious proletariat as a whole and beyond it. The reproduction of the face-to-face between labour power and capital becomes an affair of discipline. These riots were a class movement and not simply a political agitation by activists (which would equally be a class movement), but it was not a struggle within the very foundation of classes: production. This is why these riots were able to

accomplish the pivotal feat of producing and facing one's class belonging as a constraint, but they could only do that and reach this point by coming up against production's glass floor. What is more, the way (the objectives, the unfolding of the riots, the composition of the rioters...) in which this movement has produced this exterior constraint has been intrinsically defined by this limit. That was the ambivalence of this movement. The riots in Greece were not only the end of radical democratism, but also the end of the alternative milieus which, from their own critiques, in practice, of the capitalist mode of production, have made for themselves, in their own practice, the separation between reproduction and production appear, a separation which has become their glass floor.

The configuration of class struggle that settles itself makes these actors constantly hesitate between, on the one hand the perspective of the isolated individual and the reduction of the capitalist relation to coercion, and on the other hand the inclusion of this moment in exploitation and the reproduction of the class. But this inclusion takes the specific form of a call and a reference to the working class in the perspective of grass-root unionism and self-organisation. This call and its specific content took a caricatural form with the militants of the ESE (Anarcho-syndicalist union), an organisation that claims to have its roots in anarcho-syndicalism (opposed to the majority of the anarchist movement which claims "insurrectionalist" bases). That is the dilemma within which the movement is situated; it is one of its limits and simultaneously there that it constitutes a swerve (as will be seen in the following chapter) in the action of the proletariat as a class. In fact, the ESE is a very small group and the only one officially claiming adherence to anarcho-syndicalism. Their echo is very limited or even insignificant in the "milieu" in Greece. On the other hand, it is difficult to hold that a large majority of the "anarchist milieu" is composed of "insurrectionalists", even if it is clear that a large majority in the milieu considers the use of violence as a necessity. After 2003 and the decline

of the anti-globalisation movement, a kind of “restructuring” of the anarchist milieu in Greece took place; many young people joined it, which produced a widening and a modification of its relation to “society”. The attempts to set up “class unions”, coming from a not fully theorised anarcho-syndicalism, are the result of this modification. The members of these unions (primarily the union of all those who work freelance and use motorcycles) played an essential role in the initiative to occupy the GSEE. This new aspect of the relations within the anarchist milieu was one of the factors that explained, on the one hand, the strong interaction between the generalisation of the riots and the anarchist milieu, and on the other hand, the split which appeared during the occupation of the GSEE, and in other less clear-cut cases. In that sense, it is possible to say that the “milieu” itself was reproducing within itself the general ambivalence of these riots, and, and at its level, the swerve taking place there.

In Greece, it is within this configuration and the ambiguity it contained that, for the proletarians in struggle, their class belonging, their own definition as a class in their relation to capital, was produced and appeared as an exterior constraint. By their own practice, they put themselves in question as proletarians in their struggle, but they only did it by separating, in their attacks and in their objectives, the moments and the institutions of social reproduction. As for the rest, they referred to a working class that remained what it is and was only asked to self-organise (even when students/precarious workers took over two call centres, work was only interrupted for a short while). Reproduction and production of capital remained foreign to each other. The result of this hesitation was the minority character of the movement and, finally, when it receded, its concentration in the district of Exarchia in Athens and Ano Poli in Thessaloniki.

The struggle remained focused on reproduction and the third moment of exploitation. The Greek rioters could not strike, they did not put forward, for themselves, a workers identity, they only invoked it for others.

To attack capital as a reproduction that is separated and as a constraint to the reproduction of social relations is not only failing to interrupt capitalist production, but also not being able to consider, even very hypothetically, the expropriation of capital, the taking over of the elements of productive capital and of material elements of social reproduction, as well as its fluxes, with its own aim, and with all the limits and ambiguities it implies (self-management...).

In general, the “neighbourhood popular assemblies” never lasted long and left the “locals” indifferent or curious at best¹³. We must, however, point out the case of the occupation of the town hall of a district in the South of Athens where municipal clerical workers carried on some of their activities, in connection with the assembly of the neighbourhood:

In Agios Demetrios the popular assembly of the occupation tried to cooperate with the municipal clerical workers in order to restart some municipal services without the mediation of the municipal authorities. The plan was to satisfy only urgent social needs, such as issuing green cards for the immigrants as well as paying wages and extra allowances. The mayor and the municipal council intimidated the workers, trying to prevent them from providing these services. (TPTG and Blaumachen, op. cit.)

Generally, it is enough to examine the figures concerning the number of people participating in the different related demonstrations, which rarely exceeded 200 or 300 in a city (Athens- Piraeus) of over four million (cf: Short presentation of the recent events in Athens through the eyes of some proletarian participants).

To say in an emphatic tone that what happened is a “revolt of a whole part of the population”, as was written in a leaflet circulating in Paris, is

13 Aghios Dimitrios: 5 days; Halandri: 8,5 days; Zografou, in January, occupation of an old municipality café which lasted 12 days, only the occupation of another old municipal café in Nea Smirni is still going on after two months and a half (March 2009).

pure fancy. However, what numbers cannot show is the spread of the movement. If one can say that the rioters or even the demonstrators were a minority, one must add that they were a minority ...everywhere. On some days in Athens one could see four neighbourhood demonstrations occurring simultaneously as well as a central demo, while the occupations were going on. In any case, the question of whether or not it was a “mass movement” is not simply a matter of numbers; the criterion is the link between production and reproduction, which can then no longer be seen as the institutions of reproduction and of everyday life¹⁴. The limit of the expansion of these riots was not a purely quantitative problem or even just a lack (“the working class dealing directly with production should have joined the movement”), the limit should not be considered as an exterior, as something surrounding, but as something that in fact defines the very thing of which it is the limit, in an internal way.

14 Evaluating the number of demonstrators and, even more, of the rioters among them is, as we know, a difficult exercise. If one compares the figures given in An updated short presentation of the recent riots... written in December by TPTG and Blaumachen and those given by the text Like a winter with a thousand Decembers written at the beginning of February 2009 by the same authors, one can see significant differences. The 100 000 rioters on the night of the 6th of December (An updated short presentation...) become 2000 in the February text; on the contrary the 4000 of the second day become 10 000. On the third day (Monday 8 December), the 1500 rioters of the demonstration which gathered 20 000 people (that number itself did not change) become 10 000 in the February text. For the demonstrations of the following days, the February text does not give numbers any more, and one can suppose that the numbers in the December text are valid.

In Like a winter with a thousand Decembers, TPTG and Blaumachen write:

The cops were rather the most visible and the crudest tip of an iceberg made of government corruption scandals, a security-surveillance state – armoured after the 2004 Olympics – that does not even hesitate to shoot in cold blood, a continuous attack on wages, an increase of working class reproduction costs through the gradual demolition of the previous pension and health system, a deterioration of work conditions and an increase of precarious jobs and unemployment, a load of overwork imposed on high school and university students, a tremendous destruction of nature, a glamorous facade consisting of abstract objects of desire in malls and on TV ads, obtainable only if you endure a huge amount of exploitation and anxiety.

The problem is that all this was only attacked by attacking the police, attacking the tip of the iceberg.

The struggle against coercion is the struggle against “normality”, that is to say “their normality, the normality of capitalist exploitation, misery, repression and death” as a leaflet in the movement states is. The movement, in its limit and its dynamic, expresses, for better or worse, the point of view of the everyday life. From the point of view of its transformation, the banality and uninteresting character of everyday life are turned around as a proof of its centrality. Banality and boredom are posited as the general principle of this society: the giant plastic Christmas tree on Syntagma square can then become a highly strategic target protected by riot cops. The shops of Ermou street, open on Sundays to increase and facilitate Christmas shopping, were just as much targets as the underground and its dull transport of labour power: “I consume therefore I am”, “Work, consume, die” stated the banners used during a small demonstration (150 people) and an intervention in a department store that lasted an hour. But from the point of view of the critique of everyday life, the proletariat is

nothing but the commodity-labour power from which its revolt against its situation as commodity arises; this revolt does not come from the contradiction inscribed in this situation in the capitalist mode of production itself and for itself, that is to say from its very situation as commodity labour power, and from the contradictions it contains (surplus-labour/necessary labour; use-value/exchange value), but from what this situation negates: life, the lived, etc. Since the critique of everyday life does not go beyond the critique of commodities and exchange, it cannot understand the relation between the proletariat and capital as a contradiction between two terms which form a totality and which can only exist through the other, but rather understand it as two terms which are not for each other the *raison d'être* and the negation; in fact it is not a contradiction.

The principle, general contribution of the riots in Greece is to have produced within exploitation, through its own practice, the moment coercion as included in the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production rather than solely as police repression. Coercion is not limited to repression; it includes all the social processes and all the institutions through which the proletariat is constantly put in a position in which it can valorise capital. This moment is included in exploitation as the self-presupposition of capital; it is included in the process that makes capitalist production a reproduction. The moment of self-presupposition that is coercion, beyond mere police intervention, was not the cause but rather the content of the riots. These riots demonstrated the inclusion of coercion within the process of the reproduction of capitalist social relations, but they showed this inclusion as being, in an internal way, their own lack, insofar as the attack upon this moment and upon all the institutions which are placed in charge of it remained separated from production. It is the social situation of the rioters itself which appeared in this contradiction of inclusion and lack. Students without prospects, young immigrants, precarious workers – these are the proletarians who experience the reproduction of capitalist

social relations everyday as coercion, coercion which is included in this reproduction because they are proletarians, but they experience it in their everyday lives as separated and contingent (accidental and non-necessary) in relation to production itself. At the same time as they struggle in this moment of coercion as separated, they conceive and live this separation as a lack in their struggle against this mode of production. This is the way this movement produced class belonging as an external constraint, but in this way only. It is in this regard that it is situated at the level of this cycle of struggle, and constitutes one of its historically decisive moments. It is the attack upon the institutions and forms of social reproduction taken for themselves that constituted its force but simultaneously expressed its limits. The most obvious empirical manifestation of these limits being its impossibility, from what constituted its force, to spread. Despite all the popular sympathy it garnered, it never was a mass movement. It was the sympathy of interested spectators, but of spectators all the same. Consequently, the movement remained at the periphery of what were its very targets: the institutions of reproduction, which were never disturbed in a decisive way, paradoxically because they were its specific targets and its specific reason for existence. Neither the production, nor the circulation of capital were at any moment really disturbed, even when shopping in Ermou Street (or in the department stores of the periphery) was blocked on the Sunday before Christmas, it was finally a failure because customers were rushing to do their shopping. In the same way, to interrupt the broadcast of a TV programme for one minute to tell the viewers to go down to the street is pure phantasm if they are not there already.

Essentially, this movement was that of the autonomisation of reproduction, generally as everyday life, specifically as a critique of the institutional apparatuses for reproduction. These two aspects became synthesized in the critique of democracy. The riots in Greece seem to be the first movement in the recent period where democracy was centrally

and genuinely criticized, in its governmental form as well as in the mode of functioning of the struggle itself. It was a movement without political illusion, except the very critique of democracy.

Looking at the movement from France, the authors of the leaflet that circulated in Paris and to which we already referred can rightly write:

The Greek rioters show us a path that had been searched for during the contestation of the CPE and during these last weeks (occupations of secondary-schools and other buildings, blockades of communication channels and a few cars burned), they do better and refuse the rigged dialogue with the State and its henchmen.

This challenge to governmental democracy as well as to the democratic functioning of the struggle itself did not arise from a better method of struggle that would have finally been found but from its absence of demands and representatives. As a crisis of reproduction, it is the very existence of a relationship with the state, or with any institution for that matter, which is challenged: the movement produces neither demands nor representatives: “disappearance of all those who speak in our name: parties, unions, experts, journalists, associations”, the same leaflet says.

The group Blaumachen from Thessaloniki published in June 2006 a text, *Occupation, not democracy!*, which drew a critical lesson from the anti-CPE struggle that took place in France and the student struggles that happened at the same time in Greece. A few months later, in a short presentation, the content of the text was defined as follows: “[It] was determined by what we saw then as the major weaknesses of the movement, i.e. the adherence to democratic procedures and generally to a democratist ideology along with the absence of any critique of schoolwork and of the media’s mediating role.” This same presentation mentions a contemporary text (“Let the occupations become time-barricades”) introducing the ‘social wage [minimum income]’ demand. If the text correctly defines the obstacles constituted by the democratic course of the struggle, what has not

been understood is the relation between the content of the struggle, the existence of demands itself (demands imply democracy as self-recognition of the group and relation to the opponent), its actors, and its democratic form. The democratic course of the struggle is simply criticized as a bad method for struggle. Because of this, chased out the door, the democratic ideology comes back through the window.

When deliberative proceedings are constituted (an assembly, a coordination or a parliament), the principal question is not the procedures by which the will of all the participants can best express itself, but the relation between the process of debate and the action, a question which cannot be dissociated from the nature of the action itself. We don't care about procedures in which everybody's opinion can be expressed. We don't want to debate with everybody. (Blumachen, *op. cit.*)

Despite the remark that "this question cannot be dissociated from action", the question remains one of decision taking, that is to say, the starting point is always the individual and the group that will act is a sum of individuals who decided to act together. Whatever the procedure used to take the decision, the question concerns always the individual and the decision. In the course of a struggle, democracy is not a form of decision taking and relation to action that could be simply replaced by another. The formal critique of democracy does not say why it exists, why, as content, it imposes itself as the form of this struggle. This critique says rightly why this form is an obstacle but it does not say why this obstacle exists and is chosen by the actors of the struggle. From this, if the critique itself remains democratic, it is because it suggests another choice, another way to do. But, in fact, in all struggles where a critique of democratic procedures arise, what is at stake is the passage to another content of the struggle, and then it is not the former procedure that is the object of critique but the former content of the struggle. The critique of democratic procedures

does not see this passage when it tries to understand the struggle and understand itself.

During the recent riots in Greece, it seems that the movement began spontaneously and constructed itself in action directly beyond democratic procedures, recognised as obstacles, in the struggle itself and as a form of governing (democracy being immediately considered as the current form of the State and of its police that everybody hates, no more, no less). Obviously the question of “direct democracy” and of a better discussion process during the assemblies was raised (“more people must speak”, “everybody has the right to speak”, “we do not want “experts” to speak for ourselves”, “we are all equal”). But a movement that formulates no demands to the state gives to its struggle a content that necessitates no form of representation; the movement must exist for itself in its confrontations and contradictions. The procedures of decision taking involve conflicts, but they are not democratic in the sense that these decisions would imply a majority, a minority, formation of organs of representation, a general constraint of application.

It is necessary to quote at length the Second announcement of the occupation of the University of Economics of Athens to show the enormous and quite radical progress, both in theory and practice, that these riots made in their simple and direct critique of democracy.

On the other side, a dilapidated democracy, in economic crisis, without any social legitimacy because of the small and big “scandals”, because of the creation of “armies” of poor and excluded people, trying to draw the social consent, in order to crack down the riots... Theatrical performances of sensitivity in front of the cameras from the Prime Minister, the ministers, the deputies, journalists and other parasites, with simultaneous invocations for the necessity of social pacification and for the necessity of the state and the society to “walk together” under the promise of “the entrenchment of the democratic institutions”. However, the eminent constitutive myth of

democracy, the myth of the “social contract”, becomes ashes in the streets of diffused social mutiny of these days. That’s why the system attempts with all its forces to redeploy. That’s why governmental and under-governmental deliberations and statements are constantly taking place. That’s why the media in a commissioned service undertook their famous and well-known role, the one of organized falsehood and the challenging of fear syndromes [...] That’s why the schools with a statement of the ministry of education will remain closed today, trying to deter the concentrations of students. That’s why the National Workers’ Union of Greece changed the tomorrow’s strike-demonstration into a simple concentration outside of the parliament. That’s why the left winger pillars of the system, while “they comprehend” the right of the social rage, condemn the “extremities” and ask the question of the fall of the government, that’s why they change the mutiny into a simple protest against the governmental policy... (http://katalipsiasoe.blogspot.com/2008/12/2_09.html).

Quite simply, on the other side, it is democracy that stands up or rather collapses in the “breach of contract”, as is said in the text.

But such a critique does not mean that democracy did not come back in the movement in the form of its critique. This return of democracy under the form of its critique is the struggle against coercion, the normality of everyday life and the fact that these riots were directed against reproduction as a separate form.

The riots in Greece were, in action, a certain conception of the reproduction of social relations and of ideology. As it could not attack practically the reproduction of capitalist social relations at its root, that is as producing value and surplus-value, the movement mixed up production and circulation of value (even if the blockades of circulation seem to have remained symbolical), it reduced, in its practice, the reproduction of social relations to an attack against the normality of an everyday life that is commodified. If one can speak of the democratism of the critique of

democracy, it is because what is criticized, that is capitalist social relations, is then reduced to the individual's internalization of what was inculcated to him by schools, Medias, collaborationist intellectuals, social experience. Ideology is rightly seen as a practical force used by all sorts of institutions and behaviours, but the reproduction of social relations it allows is reduced to a mechanism of internalization/inculcation that would give it its practical force. The mechanism of inculcation of dominant norms, which determine and constrain the individuals' actions, would give to it the material force that perpetuates the social relations: "Shut up and shop"; "Work, vote and shut up" "Consciousness springs from barricades. Wake up." (Some banners during a demo in front of the shopping centre The Mall in Athens).

At this price, and this is the price that the riots in Greece had to pay for their limits to be their dynamic, the absence of impact and actions in the sphere of production (and this was obvious all along the movement) became, at the cost of this ideological reduction of the reproduction of capitalist social relations, a global attack against their reproduction. The problem is that the reproduction of social relations, including the relations of production, is posited as subjected to the submission of individuals to norms of behaviour whose paradigms are work and consumption, and, in the same way, the production of value appears as subjected to its circulation. In fact, society as a whole is rightly recognised as reproducing itself as production, but this production depends on the individuals' acceptance of the reproduction of social relations inculcated to them, the individuals gaining a cementing role in the social structure. The reproduction of social relations consists in the fact that, for individuals, ideas are material acts, included in practices, normalised by rituals, defined by the ideological apparatuses and the institutions from which the ideas of these subjects derive. Attacking the capitalist society globally becomes attacking the behaviours and the fears that trap the individual into an

ideological straitjacket and unconsciously dictates its conduct and its objectives, in a direction that is obviously favourable to the reproduction of the existing system. Each one of these behaviours, each one of these institutions is then produced as so many grounds for political struggles.

The economic reproduction, centred on the production/reproduction of capital, must be completed with the reproduction of the relations of production as relations of domination, keeping in mind that this reproduction must come from the integration/internalization of the values and the norms of the current society, or, when all this collapses, from violent and crude repression. The strategic aim, therefore, consists in ridding oneself of this inculcation and these habits which constitute the cement of society, that by which people can live together under the domination of the capitalists and the masters of the world.

The discarding of this inculcation was the struggle itself as well as its content; it was never in Greece a militant activity trying to bring the consciousness of its alienation to the people. The rioters acted from their own situation and against it. If one can define it as a struggle against social relations seen as inculcation and ideology, from which the general reproduction of society would depend, then it did not take the form of a relation between an enlightened avant-garde bringing consciousness and demystification and a population in need of awakening. This movement was fundamentally anti-capitalist and proudly affirmative of itself, and thanks to that it met a large part of the population without propaganda. It was a movement adequate to a crisis of the relation between capital and the proletariat, where the initiative until then was in the hands of the pole of the contradiction that subsumes the other as economy and necessity. In was the struggle—shaping of the crisis of capital, a de-objectification.

But a de-objectification that overlooked the objectivity of the economy. As we said in the introduction, “It is by becoming problematic, that is to say by being in crisis as reproduction, that the self-presupposition of

capital designates, at first, as the place for the crisis, sectors of society where its reproduction takes a specified form in relation to society itself” and we would now add: designates as the actors of this crisis this fraction of the proletariat that is defined by the vagaries of the reproduction themselves. This crisis of the reproduction affects first and foremost the “entrants” and constructs the social category of “youth”, it was concentrated in the places specialised in the reproduction, designating the precarious youth as its main actor (the 600 Euro generation). This fraction did not need any propaganda to touch the rest of the class, but reproduction appeared for it as a specific activity and status.

As a result, each behaviour or institution becomes the place and the issue of a specific struggle against the domination of capital (even if they are destined to become united); the struggles are directed against the system of domination that is responsible for maintaining the subject in its subjection (in general, prisons become the paradigmatic target of this ideological view of the capitalist mode of production). But neither the schools, the family, consumption politics, nor prisons produce classes, these are not where the social division takes its roots, as is presupposed by the concept of domination taken for itself, and its attack, however real. The struggle against domination takes as its object the same false question that is the foundation of the democratic ideology: how do individuals form a society, what is the cement that makes them hold together, for some in a dominant position, for the others in a dominated one? Society becomes an environment of the individual. The starting point is the “individual” form, distinct (opposed or integrated) from “Society”, seen as an ensemble of relations which are beyond the individual and seem foreign to him, as an environment, an objective structure, an exterior constraint to which it must adapt. The ideology of democracy is based on the question “how do individuals construct a society”; the opposite proposition “how do individual deconstruct a society?” remains then a democratic critique

of democracy. The theory of the contract, as the result of the diffusion of commodity exchange, gives way to the critique of everyday life and normality as critique of the internalisation of capital fetishism.

Under whatever aspect we consider them, in their very strength, these riots themselves have always designated a blind spot: the working class, the sphere of production.

3. DYNAMICS AND LIMITS OF THE RIOTS IN GREECE.

The revolution currently depends on the overcoming of a contradiction constitutive of class struggle: to be a class is for the proletariat the obstacle that its struggle as a class must overcome/ abolish. The riots in Greece have posed this obstacle, formalized the contradiction, but they did not go further. Here was their limit, but the contradiction is now posed practically, for this cycle of struggle, in the restructured capitalism and its crisis.

Because of the targets of the riots, their modes of action, their type of organization, the attack on capitalist society as the reproduction of social relations, the practical production of the moment coercion in the self-presupposition of capital, these riots had as their main content the struggle of the proletariat against its own existence as a class. This essential determination of the current struggles did not autonomise itself as it did in the “direct action movement” at the beginning of the 2000s, the fact of being a proletarian did not become something to be overcome as a prerequisite for the contradiction and for the struggle against capital. The movement of the riots in Greece was not content with itself; contrary to the direct action movement, it did not construct itself as self-referential. The movement always wanted to be and was really a movement of the proletarian class. But it is precisely this will and this real existence of its action as a class that it stumbled against, as its internal limit. On the one hand, the calling into question by the proletariat of its own existence as a class remained the fact of a minority, since it was restricted to a segment

of the work force (students, precarious workers, immigrants), even if this minority happened to be present everywhere. The generality of this fragment's situation remained its particularity and the calling into question of reproduction remained separated from production in the coercion moment of the self-presupposition of capital. On the other hand, the existence of the movement as class activity was split between this putting into question and a "call" that asked the working class, in the manifestation of its autonomy and of its self-organization, to join it. This was in clear contradiction with the putting into question of the proletariat of its own existence as a class which was then at stake.

This final aspect of the riots played an essential part in the dynamics and the limits of the movement. On the one hand, the riots, which were the act of a class, produced class belonging as an exterior constraint, because of its very actors. On the other hand, it could only remain the act of a class (to escape the autonomisation of its refusal of the proletarian condition as a life style) in its minority separation (we saw that it was not only a question of numbers) by referring to a working class that, as for autonomy and self-organization, is largely mythical. It could take the strange and caricatural form of this text which, thanks to its attractive title, circulated widely on the web: An open letter to students by workers in Athens¹⁵ One could read in it this sentence, full of grandiloquence if empty of meaning: "Don't stay alone; call us [...] Don't be afraid to call us to change our lives all together."

This junction, according to a Greek anarcho-sindicalist, was principally looked for by the people occupying the School of Economics, who could be characterized as class struggle anarchists (compared to those occupying

15 This text has circulated in France with this title, but its exact title is only An open letter to students. It was written by a participant in the events in order to reduce the distance between workers and students.

the Polytechnic School: “purist” anarchists, according to the same that can be found on the Caen CNT-AIT website). The “Workers Committees” organized at the School of Economics (ASOEE) and mentioned in the same text, have never existed, let alone “committees” of a specific sector. What happened was limited to interventions at work places that hardly had any result. Even if the working class, on the whole, did not move during those days, the work of linking and making the junction was not a pure militant act and the general sympathy the movement found within the mass of workers was not simply some sort of compassion. On Monday 8th December (two days after the murder of Alexander), during a demonstration estimated to have gathered 20 000 people, many of them, maybe more than 1 500, were walking “in and out” of the demonstration, attacking banks and destroying the luxury shops of the town centre. Plenty of looting took place in the shops at the entrance of the Pirea Avenue, people were walking slowly and no one really tried to stop the attacks or the looting. (cf. An updated short presentation of the recent riots in Athens and Thessaloniki through the eyes of some proletarian participants, TPTG and Blaumachen) In the same way, on Thursday 18th December, during another one of these large demonstrations, the head of the demonstration slowed down to prevent the cops from encircling the anarchist cortege. The connection existed objectively. It is obvious for any worker that state repression is intrinsically linked to economic exploitation, to poverty, to lays-offs. In a Europe that demands 70 hours of work per week for workers, repression becomes the last “argument” of the capitalist class and of the States.

Despite this, during this whole period, no wave of strikes could be seen, not even local strikes of any real amplitude, while spontaneous and violent demonstrations multiplied, especially during the first days that followed the murder of Alexander. Even the teachers only did a 24 hours

strike on 9th December, the day preceding the general strike planned by the GSEE¹⁶ long before the events.

During the general strike of 10th December “against the 2009 state budget”, the unions replaced the planned demonstration by a simple gathering on Syntagma square which gathered only 7000 people. A few clashes with the police took place, but for the rest of the demonstrators, despite the frustration expressed, it worked.

Above all, the following day, no picket lines could be seen. If, on Wednesday 17th December, the striking workers of the Acropolis (still in construction) building site supported some students as they hung two giant banners on the site, they stopped their strike the same day as they received the promise that their demands would be met. On the following day, 18th December, the rank and file union of the postmen (who aspire to represent all freelance workers using motorbikes for their job) called for a one-day strike, while the union of workers employed in bookshops and printing offices called for a 4 hours strike (from 13h to 17h). On Friday 19th December, “During the day permanent and temp workers, students and unemployed from the occupations of ASOEE and GSEE organized interventions in two call centres: MRB (which is a company organizing public opinion polls) and OTE (which is the national telecommunications company of Greece). The first intervention took place around noon and only a few people participated because of the long distance between the site and the city centre. Around 60 people participated in the second intervention and blocked the work process for a few minutes. The temp workers in the call centre responded to the action in a positive way.” (TPTG and Blaumachen, Greece unrest: the story so far). “in a positive way...”, but they continued working.

16 GSEE: General Confederation of Greek Workers. It is the unique union central and its leadership is linked to the Greek socialist party.

In Thessaloniki, on Monday 9th December, day of Alexander's funeral, all public sector workers stopped working for the afternoon. In Thessaloniki again, during a demonstration that went through working class districts: "Many local habitants applauded, while others joined the demo, a fact that manifests a wider sympathy with the insurrection even from proletarians that didn't participate in riots or other actions" (TPTG and Blaumachen, op. cit.). To summarize, plenty of sympathy, few actions.

The riot, in general, was not felt in any significant way in the workplaces, in the sense that no strikes were called to support it. The only exceptions were the teachers' strike on the day of the funeral of young Alexis and the big participation in the strike demo against the state budget on the 10th of December. Apart from these, the rebellion left workplaces untouched." (TPTG and Blaumachen, *Like a winter with a thousand Decembers*)

In the January issue of *Courant Alternatif*, one can read:

A movement of a global character, but maybe not really generalised. And it was probably its main limit. Probably what was lacking for it to spread like wildfire was a few more communal popular assemblies. Probably, what was missing as well was the mobilization of social actors (workers, notably wage-earners), in the inscription of their own locations as well as in the total visibility of these places and the way to occupy them that the general political events of the uprising had or could have brought.

Beyond the relative obscurity of the end of the sentence, to describe, when speaking of class struggle, "workers and notably wage-earners" as "social actors", is, to say the least, a euphemism, and to describe their absence as simply something that was "lacking" reveals a theory of class struggle that is quite difficult to grasp. Beyond these critiques, be it for TPTG, Blaumachen as well as *Courant Alternatif*, this absence is so blatant it cannot be ignored. But to refer to it as simply a lack in relation to what happened reveals an error of method and of analysis. The limit

is part of the definition of what it is the limit of, the limit is not exterior to the definition.

It is impossible to understand the importance of what happened in Greece without taking these facts into account. In such a situation, the wish of a Greek anarcho-syndicalist that “from all this a new movement with workers structures, union structures, social structures will arise that will be more popular, more organized and more focused on struggles”, balances between incantation and obsolescence.

The movement was an attack, a calling into question, a refusal by proletarians of their situation as proletarians, but its actors were a fraction of the proletariat (students, precarious workers, often both, and migrant workers) which, even if it expressed the general situation of the workers, remained a particular fraction, and this during the whole movement. What was decisive is that this calling into question in the class struggle did not autonomise itself, it wanted to be and it was from the beginning a workers manifestation, it remained the act of a class and its relations within the working class. These riots formalized clearly and in practice what is at stake in the current class struggle: to act as a class in the struggle against capital implies for the proletariat its own calling into question and posits the fact of acting as a class as the limit it must overcome. Things appeared and were done as such. One can count on the unfolding of the crisis for the generality not to remain particular.

When the contradictory relation between the proletariat and capital is situated at the level of reproduction, the contradiction between the proletariat and capital contains the calling into question by the proletariat of the movement in which it is itself reproduced as a class. This is now the content of class struggle and what is at stake in it. To act as a class is now, on the one hand, to have as a horizon only capital and the categories of its reproduction, and, on the other hand it is, for the same reason, to be in contradiction with one's own class reproduction, to call it into

question. In the current cycle of struggle the contradiction between the proletariat and capital becomes so tense that class definition becomes an exterior constraint, an exteriority which exists only because capital exists. Class belonging is exteriorised as a constraint. This is the moment of the qualitative leap in class struggle, it is now possible to have, not a change within the system but a change of system.

The dynamic of this cycle of struggle appears like a swerve within class struggle, that is to say like a swerve within the very fact of acting as a class.

In the very forms of its actions, the movement expressed this constitutive swerve. We already insisted on the attack of all the institutional forms of the general reproduction of capitalist social relations (essentially the State), without this attack of reproduction to include production. The attack of reproduction found itself as if floating above the glass floor that separates it from production. The blockades and the occupations should also be considered as forms deriving from this situation. Let us leave aside, in order to consider them in themselves, the fact that the blockades do not seem to have been particularly efficient.

The strategy of the blockade comes from a true idea: capital is value in process, that is to say that value remains itself when it passes from the money form to the commodity form, from production to exchange, that circulation and production are each a moment of each other and include themselves reciprocally.

Stating the fundamental conditions of the capital relation (in *Grundrisse*), Marx lists:

- on one side, living labour power;
- on the other side value or materialized labour;
- a free exchange relation as mediation between the two;

“Lastly, the side that represents the objective conditions of labour as independent values existing for themselves must have the value-form

and must aim at the self-valorisation of money, rather than immediate enjoyment or the creation of use-values.”

Point 4 is not simply a gloss over point 2, it arises from the double relation of mediation (circulation) between the extremes it mediates: presupposition and result. One must then distinguish between two acceptations of exchange (of circulation): on the one hand, exchange as a specific moment of the process of reproduction, which therefore alternates with the production phase, on the other hand, exchange as form of the process of reproduction, as for example in expressions like “production based on exchange”. As moments facing each other circulation and production are immediate, must be mediated. For simple circulation, this mediation is the process of production which generates commodities which must again be thrown back in it from outside. For capital, as soon as one considers it in its general movement, production includes circulation and vice-versa.

[C]irculation is itself a moment of production, since capital becomes capital only through circulation; production is a moment of circulation only in so far as the latter is itself regarded as the totality of the production process. (Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook V, Penguin, 1973)

Therefore, contrary to the case of simple circulation, the elements that circulation mediates are not longer exterior to it, but rather are its presuppositions and its result.

The fact that production is included as a moment of circulation and vice-versa should not make us forget that the totality is composed of distinct moments, precisely detailed by Marx at the very same time when he affirms this reciprocal inclusion.

If we examine the entire turnover of capital, then four moments appear, or, each of the two great moments of the production process and the circulation process appears again in a duality: we can take either circulation or production as the point of departure here [...] The moments are: (I) The real production process and its duration. (II) Transformation of the

product into money. Duration of this operation. (III) Transformation of the money in the proper proportions into raw material, means of labour and labour, in short, into the elements of productive capital. (IV) The exchange of a part of the capital for living labour capacity can be regarded as a particular moment, and must be so regarded, since the labour market is ruled by other laws than the product market etc. (Grundrisse, Notebook V, chapter: The four moments in the turnover of capital)

The immediate process does not put an end to the life cycle of capital, it must be completed by the circulation process which becomes the mediation of the process of social production. The social production process differs from the immediate production process to the extent that the latter is opposed to immediate circulation.

If we return to the strategy of the blockade, one realises that while fundamentally true in theory, it nevertheless leads to a great deal of confusion. First of all, the confusion between circulation and transports: circulation doesn't have the same meaning for capital as for the gendermerie. The confusion between circulation as a specific moment of the process of reproduction, which thus alternates with the phase of production, and circulation as the general form of the process of reproduction. In any case it is true that commodities and labour power must materially move from one point to another (exchange, in a strictly economic sense, in the capitalist mode of production, has little to do with this question) and that it is indispensable to the reproduction of capital. In fact, in the theory of capital as circulation, the strategy of the blockade rests on a theoretical foundation that does not correspond to its effective practice. This is not a serious problem so long as one is concerned with actions, but it becomes one when theories regarding the definition of productive labour and value are grafted onto these confusions. Blocking the traffic hinders the production of value because it necessarily has repercussions on it, not because it is in itself blocking the production of value. It would

even be more accurate to say that it is not a blockade of the circulation, but of the production in the sense that transports are an extension of the immediate production process. The strategy of “blocking the traffic” neither necessitates nor justifies any theoretical aggiornamento.

To return to Greece (among others, as the strategy of the blockade is characteristic of a growing number of struggles), the blockade is recognized by its very actors as the form of struggle of those who have no immediate hold over production. The blockade is however not a stopgap solution insofar as it can be extremely effective. But in the case of Greece, it is, as a form of struggle, in line with the separation between the attack against the reproduction of the social relations on one side and production on the other side, a separation which defined the riots. Here the reproduction is the movement of the “entrants” (input) in the production process, the condition for its continuity.

As for the occupations of public buildings, which were a new form of struggle coming from the riots, they find their place in the general movement of attacks against all the institutional forms of the reproduction.

When we speak about the separation between reproduction and production, production and circulation, does it mean that the Greek rioters were not productive workers, or worse, that they were not proletarians (or marginal and peripheral proletarians)? If one wants to think in those terms, many of the rioters were productive workers in the strictest sense: exchanging their labour power with a capital engaged in the production sector. What is more, a strict definition of productive labour does not mean that only productive workers are proletarians. An unproductive worker sells her labour power and is exploited by the capitalist in the same way, and the degree of her exploitation will determine the part of surplus-value she will be able to appropriate as profit. It is from the strict definition of productive labour that one can deduce that the proletariat is not limited to productive workers. Indeed, first, it is in the very essence of surplus-value

to exist as profit, including for productive capitals, second, for this very reason, it is the capitalist class as a whole that exploits the working class as a whole, in the same way as a proletarian belongs to the capitalist class before selling herself to this or that boss. However, the global social labour that capital creates by appropriating it (social labour does not pre-exist in a proletarian or in the class as a whole before its appropriation) is not a homogeneous mass without distinctions, mediations or hierarchies; it is not a significant totality in which each part contains the determinations of the totality. We should not forget a central problem: if each proletarian has a formally identical relation to her particular capital, she does not have the same relation to social capital depending on her being a productive worker or not (it is here not a problem of consciousness, but an objective situation). If the contradiction represented by productive labour was not at the core of class struggle, for the capitalist mode of production and for the proletariat, we could not speak of revolution (it would be something exogenous to the mode of production, at best a utopia, at worse nothing.) It is the very mode through which labour exists socially, valorisation, which is the contradiction between the proletariat and capital. Defined by exploitation, the proletariat is in contradiction with the socially necessary existence of its labour as capital, that is to say an autonomised value which remains so only through valorising itself: the falling rate of profit is a contradiction between the classes. The proletariat is constantly in contradiction with its own definition as a class: the necessity of its reproduction is something it finds facing it in the form of capital, and for capital the proletariat is always necessary and at the same time to be done away with. The proletariat never finds its confirmation in the reproduction of the social relation in which it is yet a necessary pole. This is the contradiction of productive labour.¹⁷

17 Productive labour is only an abbreviated expression for the whole relation, and the manner in which labour capacity and labour

Productive workers are not for all that revolutionaries by nature and at all times. Classes are not collections of individuals, the proletariat and the capitalist class are the social polarisation of the contradiction which is the falling rate of profit or productive labour structuring society as a whole. The specific relation (compared to any other exploited labour) between productive labour and social capital does not get fixed as the essence of productive workers. However, in the contradiction of productive labour which structures society as a whole and polarises it into contradictory classes, productive workers have a specific place. Through blocking the production of value and surplus-value, the men who live at the core of the conflict of capital as contradiction in process do not simply “block”. In their singular action, which is nothing special but only their engagement in the struggle, the contradiction that structures society as a whole as class struggle comes back on itself, on its own condition. It is thanks to this that class belonging can disintegrate and that within its struggle the proletariat can start its self-transformation (this depends on all sorts of circumstances and does not happen each time productive workers are on strike.)

If the proletariat is not limited to the class of the workers producing surplus-value, it is still the contradiction that is productive labour which constructs it. Productive labour (productive of surplus-labour, that is to say of capital) is the living and objective contradiction of this mode of production. It is not a nature attached to people: the same worker can accomplish tasks which are productive and others which are not; the productive character of labour can be defined at the level of the collective worker; the same (temp) worker can change, from one week to another, from a productive job to one that is not. But the relation between the proletariat as a whole and capital is constructed by the contradictory situation of productive labour in the capitalist mode of production. What

figure in the capitalist production process. (Marx, Results of the Immediate Production Process, “Productive and unproductive labour”)

is important is to know, always historically and conjecturally, how this essential (constitutive) contradiction constructs, at a given point in time, class struggle, knowing that it is in the very nature of the capitalist mode of production that this contradiction does not appear clearly, surplus-value becoming by definition profit and capital being value in process.

The revolution may start in the factory, but it will not remain there. It will begin its own task when workers leave them to abolish them, it will confront self-organisation, autonomy and everything that is linked to “councilism”. This revolution will be the revolution of an epoch in which the contradiction between classes is situated at the level of their reciprocal implication and their reproduction. And “the weakest link” of this contradiction, the exploitation which ties the classes together, is situated in the moments of the social reproduction of labour power, precisely where, far from affirming itself, the definition of the proletariat as the class of productive labour appears always (and more and more in the current forms of reproduction) as contingent and uncertain, not only for each proletarian in particular but also structurally for the whole class. But if the class struggle remains a movement at the level of reproduction, it will not have integrated in itself its own *raison d'être*: production. It is currently the recurrent limit of all the riots and “insurrections”, what defines them as “minority” events. The revolution will have to go into the sphere of production in order to abolish it as a specific moment of human relations and by doing so abolish labour by abolishing wage-labour. It is here the decisive role of productive labour and of those who, at a given moment, are the direct bearers of its contradiction, because they experience it in their existence for capital that is at the same time necessary and superfluous. Objectively, they have the capacity to make of this attack a contradiction for capital itself, to turn back the contradiction that is exploitation against itself. The path to the abolition of exploitation goes through exploitation itself; like capital, the revolution is still an objective process.

It is in the revolutionary process that the very definition of the proletariat as the class of productive workers will appear really, in practice, as limited. The definition of the proletariat is no longer a socio-economical definition, as is the definition of the capitalist class, but the polarisation, as activities, of the terms of the contradiction that exploitation is, which is already for each struggle the criterion that makes it possible to judge of its deepening and of the disclosure of its own causes.

In Greece, the question was never posed in terms of productive or unproductive workers, of core or periphery of the proletariat. The rioters (for example working in the fast food industry) could be productive workers in a strict sense and the municipal employees who remained more or less spectators could be unproductive workers in a strict sense. The separation between reproduction and production that was characteristic of this movement for the best and for its limits resulted from the specific situation of these workers, not on the level of their “productiveness” or “unproductiveness” but simply on the form of their labour contract or their situation in the “running out of future” of the capitalist mode of production.

The current crisis innovates in regard to the management of employment by companies. In previous crises, including the 1993 crisis, to adjust labour power to the decrease in production, companies first reduced overtime, ended temporary and short term contracts, and only then would they use short-time work before resorting to mass redundancies. In the current crisis, precarious jobs (short-term or temporary) appear to have a much more important role as a “shock absorber” thereby protecting more the “core” of the proletariat (in France for example, overtime increased in September and October 2008), which does not prevent short-time from growing. This type of management is the result of the flexibilisation of the labour market that was established during the development of the

restructured capitalist mode of production. The number of precarious workers has become so large that the unemployment figures are soaring.

In the contradiction between the proletariat and capital, one can no longer find anything that would be sociologically given a priori, as the large factory “mass worker” used to be. The diffuse, segmented, fragmented and sector-based character of the conflicts is unavoidable when the contradiction between classes is situated at the level of capital’s reproduction, and this obviously structured the struggles in Greece.

No fraction of the working class is more central than another, what counts is the dynamic and the crisis of the modalities of exploitation of the global labour power. What can be reasonably considered is that this mode of exploitation of global labour power is reaching its limits, as crisis of this cycle of accumulation and as revolutionary overcoming of this cycle of struggle, overcoming that it will have itself produced. But as long as exclusion will appear as exclusion, it will mean paradoxically that the social relation of exploitation is reproduced. Until now, in Greece, there was no significant strike, the functioning of the state was not blocked at all, the occupations were essentially limited to universities, a few local town halls, theatres and briefly radio stations, and the term “insurrection” that was sometimes used, is misleading. If the riots created important damages, nothing has blocked the main movements of Greek companies. For the moment nothing necessitates an army intervention, a possibility that was sometimes raised. However, there is no logical, theoretical, historical or empirical link between the dynamic of a movement and the minority or majority aspect of those who, at a given moment, expressed it. It is simply the minority aspect that must intervene as a determination in the definition of this dynamic.

Because of their content, their development, and their actors, these riots were a struggle of the proletariat in Greece. They constituted a class movement within which the action as a class was split between, on the one

hand, the putting into question by the proletariat of its own existence as a class, which was so because it was separated at the level of reproduction, and, on the other hand, the attempt at a junction with the “masses,” which was itself a confirmation of its limits, but which, as a conscious expression of its lack, prevented its autonomisation. This was the swerve that took place in the activity of the class during these riots.

The occupation of the building of the GSEE, on Monday 17th December, was a revealing moment of this situation. The initiative seems to have come from fast-food delivery people, workers employed in the book industry, an anarcho-syndicalist group, the “union” of “freelance workers working with their motorbikes” and non-unionised people (all together approximately 70 people). While the general secretary of the GSEE, after the failure to retake the building by force, declared that the participants “were not workers” because “workers were at work”, two proletarians participating in the occupation answered:

We are working people, we are jobless (paying in layoffs our participations in strikes called by GSEE, when they – the trade unionists – are rewarded with promotions), we are working under contract moving from job to job, we work insecured formally or informally in “internship” programs or in subsidised jobs to lower the unemployment indices. We are part of this world and we are here. Whoever wants to understand can understand. We are insurgent workers, end of story. (http://athens.indymedia.org/front.php3?lang=el&article_id=948395)

We must as well quote the text of the Declaration of the General Assembly of Insurgent Workers of Athens (from the liberated building of the GSEE).

We decided to occupy the building of GSEE [...] To disperse the media-touted myth that the workers were and are absent from the clashes, and that the rage of these days was an affair of some 500 “mask-bearers”, “hooligans” or some other fairy tale [...] To flay and uncover the role of

the trade union bureaucracy in the undermining of the insurrection -and not only there. GSEE and the entire trade union mechanism that supports it for decades and decades, undermine the struggles, bargain our labour power for peanuts, perpetuate the system of exploitation and wage slavery. [...] As workers we have to start taking our responsibilities, and to stop assigning our hopes to wise leaders or “able” representatives. [...] The creation of collective “grassroot” resistances is the only way. To propagate the idea of self-organization [...] abolishing the bureaucrat trade unionists. (http://athens.indymedia.org/front.php3?lang=el&article_id=948395)

According to the text by TPTG and Blaumachen that we already quoted, it was obvious from the beginning that there were two tendencies in this occupation: a “workerist” one (a term that is used in the text), that wanted to use the occupation symbolically in order to criticize the trade unionist bureaucracy and promote the idea of a grass-root unionism independent from political influences; and the other, “proletarian” (idem), that wanted to attack one more institution of capitalist society, criticize unionism and to use that place for the construction of one more community of struggle in the context of the general unrest. TPTG’s text write as a conclusion: “The leftist trade unionists that were present in the assembly did not really know what to do with all these insurgent workers [between 400 and 800, depending on sources, at the end of the 18th December demonstration] and left.” (The occupation came to an end on the 21st of December after a “decision” of the occupation committee.). It is in this sense that the occupation of the GSEE shows well the internal split in the movement, that is to say what we defined as a swerve within the activity as a class which poses it within itself as its own limit. One of the terms of this split can also be seen in the will to create coordinations at the Law Faculty, held by leftist groups. Within the occupation of the School of Polytechnics itself, above all during the first three or four days,

explosive oppositions, sometimes explosives, existed between anarchists and many young immigrant proletarians on the question of looting.

This limit was formalised, in a largely incantatory manner, by the “anarcho-syndicalist” fraction of the movement which considers the GSEE guilty for its absence in the movement. This absence in the biggest rebellion of the last 50 years indicates the debacle and the failure of unionism and the bureaucratic state. [...] This behaviour [the cancellation of the demonstration on the 10th of December] goes against the interests of the workers and the people; it is one more step on the path of collaboration with the state and against class struggle. We denounce this politic of betrayal from the GSEE and reiterate the urgent need for a new union confederation in Greece” [translator’s note: this text, available entirely in French on a CNT website is only partially translated on Libcom under the title “Interview with a libertarian syndicalist”]

A beautiful way of affirming the “failure of unionism” while calling for the creation of a new confederation.

Whatever the union, unionism expresses the activity of the class because this activity implies capital in a conflictual way and presupposes its relation to it. Function of the reciprocal implication between classes (because the proletariat is well and truly a class of this mode of production), unionism finds itself necessarily compelled to foresee the renewing of this relation on the basis of the necessities of capital, it is a function of the activity of the class in its implication with capital, it can only, without committing a betrayal, try to reproduce and consolidate this situation. The union is a functional expression of a real situation of the working class.

But this fraction does not content itself with the denunciation of the existing union, while waiting for the formation of a new coordination or preparing for it. It appeals to the autonomy and the self-organisation of the working-class. Lastly, the aim to be reached is defined in the text/ leaflet Nothing will ever be the same (see above):

The destruction of the temples of consumption, the reappropriation of goods, the “looting”, that is, of all these things that are taken from us, while they bombard us with advertisements, is the deep realisation that all this wealth is ours, because we produce it. [...] This wealth does not belong to the shop-owners, or the bankers, this wealth is our sweat and blood. [...] A society where everybody will decide collectively in general meetings of schools, universities, workplaces and neighbourhoods

Such a perspective of appropriation not only does not make any sense but is also the most beautiful homage that one could pay to this society (let us not comment on a “society” where there will still be schools, universities and workplaces).

When one listens to the advocates of autonomy and self-organisation, one wonders if their opposition to the unions is a fundamental one, expressing the revolutionary opposition of the proletariat to its “economic” situation, to its status of market “category”, or if it is a “democratic” opposition to the “permanent”, “bureaucratic” and “uncontrolled” character of these organs. We know very well which role these “committees” can have, as they tend to be mere reserve unions when the permanent cops are overwhelmed. Any organisation that is not a moment of the revolutionary overcoming becomes a union, and whether the latter is “temporary”, “democratic” or “dismissible” does not change anything.

The process of the revolution is one of the abolition of what is self-manageable. To conceive the “autonomy of struggle” as the ability to pass from a struggle for demands to a revolutionary struggle is a construction that is not interested in the content of this passage, it remains a formal approach to class struggle. If the content of the passage is left aside, it is because the autonomy prevents the understanding of this passage as a rupture, a qualitative leap. The “passage” would only be an affirmation and a revelation of the true nature of what exists: the proletariat as it is in capital triumphs in the revolution, it become the absolute pole of society.

The “leap” is then simply a formality. Of course, when the proletariat self-organises, it breaks with its previous situation, but if this rupture is only its revelation, the reorganisation of what it is, of its activity, without capital rather than the destruction of its previous situation, that is to say if it remains self-organised, if it does not go beyond this stage, it can only be defeated.

During the struggle, the subject that was the subject of autonomy transforms itself and abandons its old form to only recognise itself as existing in the existence of capital, it is the exact opposite of autonomy and self-organisation which, by nature, take their meaning in a liberation of the proletariat, its affirmation, and, why not (for nostalgics) its dictatorship.

As the proletariat self-organises, it can only do so on the basis of what it is in the categories of capital. It is not a question of the definition of self-organisation or of autonomy, it is about a social process, a process of rupture in the class struggle, the self-transformation of a subject that abolishes what defines it. To say this is a flux, a dynamic, hides the rupture as the transformation of the subject of the struggle that abolishes itself as proletarian, which is therefore no longer the subject that self-organised from its situation as proletarian. If the proletariat abolishes itself, it does not self-organise. To call the movement as a whole self-organisation is to be blind to its content.

It is always possible to hold that self-organisation is the very flux of this change in class struggle. One would first make the rupture disappear, and then split what is homogeneous in the revolutionary activity: the coincidence between the change in circumstances and the activity and change of oneself. Then, the proletariat organises itself but does not self-organise, because the driving force behind this transformation is first and foremost the production of what it is as an exterior constraint: its *raison d'être* outside itself (that is to say capital). When, in the course of the struggle, it is obliged to call into question what it is itself, there is

no self-organisation because the course of the struggle confirms no pre-existing subject as it would be in itself outside the struggle. One can speak of the “self-organisation” of the struggle, it does not change anything to the fact that, in their struggle, proletarians find only all the divisions of wage-labour and of exchange, and no organisational form can overcome this division. Only a change in the content of this struggle can do it, but then it is the rupture that consists in recognizing in capital its own necessity as a class (outside oneself), the very opposite of all the “self...”. One cannot hold, and now this cannot be ignored, that the revolution is the abolition of classes and immediate communisation while still using a scheme that valorises self-organisation as a revolutionary process. (To be specific, what we mean by communisation and abolition of the state is, in the very course of the revolutionary struggle, the abolition of the state, of exchange, of the division of labour, of all forms of property, the fact that things would be more and more for free, seen as the unification of human activity. These are “measures” that abolish capital and that are imposed by the very necessities of the struggle against the capitalist class. It is this content of the future revolution that, in the current cycle of struggle, the struggles announce each time that the very fact of acting as a class appears as an exterior constraint, a limit to be overcome.)

Self-organisation could be this process to the extent that it is the “refusal of mediations”, but, notwithstanding the fact that what we have here has always been the refrain of the ultra-left, what announces the rupture is not the refusal of mediations but the putting into question of what makes mediation exist: to be a class.

In this sense, there was no self-organisation during the riots in Greece. People decided what they wanted to do together, without the collective and/or majority decision being a condition of their actions. As for the teacher and student coordinations, they were purely and mainly places for leftist formal fights; already Blaumachen’s text in 2006 (Occupation, not

democracy!) mentioned all the suspicion that this kind of organisation now provokes: “The national coordination is a certain political power’s attempt to dominate the movement.” (Blaumachen, op.cit.). Nowadays, the multiplication of diverse collectives, which have a hell of a time coordinating their efforts when they want to, shows quite well that class unity is an objectification in capital. It is the exteriority of class belonging which is announced as a present characteristic of the struggle as a class. It is not to say that the more the class is divided, the better it is, but that the generalization of a movement of strikes or riots is not equal to its unity, it is not the overcoming of differences that are only seen as accidental and formal. We must start to understand what is at stake in these diffuse movements, fragmented and discontinuous: the creation of a distance from this “substantial” unity, objectified in capital. The unity of the proletariat can now only be the activity through which it abolishes itself in abolishing everything that divides it.

How can a “unity” arise, in a general movement of class struggle, that is not in fact a unity but rather an inter-activity? We do not know... But class struggle has often showed us its infinite inventiveness.

4. A HISTORICAL MILESTONE

During the riots, the production by the proletariat of its own existence as a class did not autonomise itself in the refusal of the proletarian condition, becoming a lifestyle and a precondition for opposing capital, because in it the terms of the struggle against precariousness were united from the start. This is contrary to the situation in France, where these terms divided the anti-CPE struggle in the spring of 2006 in relation to the riots that occurred in November 2005 in the suburbs. In that regard, these riots constitute a historical milestone: they are a clear formulation of the production of a swerve within the activity as a class; they are an “overcoming” of the limits of the movements which preceded them; not

only are they situated in capital as it arose from the restructuring of the years 1970–1980, but also in the beginning of the crisis of this capitalism.

Because it did not demand anything, the content of the revolt that took place in France in November 2005 was the refusal of the causes of the revolt; the rioters attacked their own condition, they took as their target everything that produces and defines them. This was not caused by an imaginary radicalism which would be intrinsic to the “banlieue kids”. Rather, it is due to the conjunction of two current causes: on the one hand, the specific situation of this fraction of the proletariat, on the other hand, the fact that, in a generalised way, demands are no longer what they used to be (it is no longer the step leading to the growing power of the proletariat within the capitalist society that would prefigure and prepare its affirmation as the dominant class, generalising its condition to the whole of society). The rioters revealed and attacked the proletarian situation now: this labour power that is made precarious around the world, which made the wish to become an “ordinary proletarian” completely obsolete in the very moment when such a demand could have been made.

This interweaving between having demands and calling oneself into question as a proletarian, which is characteristic of this cycle of struggle and which can be summarized as class belonging being the general limit of this cycle, reached its climax in the riots of November 2005 because of the particularity of its actors. The demand had disappeared.

Three months later (spring 2006), during the anti-CPE struggle, everybody knew what could emerge from a withdrawal of the CPE: at best, if the unions’ projects had succeeded, a French version of flex-security. Who wanted that? Certainly not the majority of students, precarious workers, and schoolchildren who were in the streets. However, as a movement with demands, that would have been the only outcome. An outcome that the movement could not face. The anti-CPE movement was a movement having demands for which the satisfaction of the demands was unacceptable for

itself as a movement with demands. As a movement with demands, the student movement could only understand itself by becoming the general movement of all precarious workers, but then, it would either sabotage itself in its own specificity or have to confront more or less violently all those who, during the riots of November 2005, showed that they did not want to act as a mass to be lead. To make the demand succeed by widening it meant ruining the demand. Who believed in the junction with the November rioters on the basis of a stable working contract for everybody? This junction was on the one hand objectively inscribed in the genetic code of the movement and, the other hand, this very necessity of the junction produced a love/hate internal to the movement, which was objective as well. The anti-CPE struggle was a movement with demands whose fulfillment would have been unacceptable for itself as a movement with demands.

The riots in Greece started where the anti-CPE struggle ended.

I have utterly no qualification to comment on the specific Greek conditions, but I have the impression that there are important contrasts with France in 2005. Spatial segregation of immigrant and poor youth seems less extreme than in Paris, but job prospects for petty bourgeois kids are considerably worse: the intersection of these two conditions brings into the streets of Athens a more diverse coalition of students and young unemployed adults. Moreover, they inherit a tradition of protest and culture of resistance that is unique in Europe. (Mike Davis, *op. cit.*)

The inclusion of migrant workers in the movement is one of the most significant elements of this historical milestone constituted by the riots in Greece.

As far as immigrants are concerned, Albanians of second generation participated mostly in the attacks against cops and buildings and immigrants of other origin – mostly Afghans and Africans – confined themselves to looting. (TPTG and Blaumachen, *op.cit.*)

The militants of “Athens’ Haunt of Albanian Migrants” distributed a leaflet on the 15th of December at a student picket line outside the police headquarters, stating their share in the riots, “These days are ours, too”. The acid attack against Konstantina Kuneva, the Bulgarian union member of a cleaning company that was a little too recalcitrant, during this period of riots, cannot be just a coincidence. For the capitalist class, it is not simply a matter of fighting but also of punishing. Eventually, it is the proletariat as a whole that will have to be treated as *ilots*¹⁸ within the capitalist mode of production.

We have to consider seriously the fact that we are engaged in a class struggle which is a large historical movement, with its deep tendencies, its restructurings, its necessities, but we are engaged in it each day as it comes. It is in the incessant interaction between all these levels, between the specific and the general, that we make our way, that we have to weigh our actions and those of our adversaries. (Along the same lines, Marx says somewhere that one should not take chance into account, because the events which occur by chance, by definition, go in all directions and, at the end, cancel each other; this is true, but within a long series and in the long run). The same can be said about the aggression (at that point) against Konstantina Kuneva and the shooting at the police, which was probably a provocative manoeuvre. It is possible to say that these things have little interest as long as we find ourselves far from them, chronologically or otherwise. But for anybody involved in the events, this position is impossible to hold. In Italy, after Piazza Fontana, the Italicus and Bologna station, it would have been unrealistic to be indifferent to the interpretation of

18 The *ilots*, who belonged to ancient populations under the sway of Sparta, were State slaves, attached to the land and obliged to pay ground-rent, granted by the city to specific citizens. They did not have any political rights, but they were numerous and the Spartans feared their revolts.

these events. We do not have the possibility to do without a critical and continuous understanding of the course of the events which, before being history, its laws and its necessity, is our unpredictable and ambiguous everyday life. “Provocations” are an ordinary part of the repression and of the management of class struggle by capital and the State. To avoid this type of question is to have a conception of capital in its objectivist virginity, implying that it would content itself simply with being. The process of capital is the process of class struggle and these are composed of living human beings with their decisions, their mistakes, their genius.

To conclude: it might well be that this struggle was not really massive, but unifying; it overcame the internal contradictions of the period of the autumn 2005 / spring 2006 in France. The adherence of many people other than the “enragés” or “direct demonstrators” in their offensive attitude against the cops seen as an “occupation army” and its echo in many places of the world, can indicate that what is at stake in Greece, in this conflict, is widely recognised in the world, that the situation of the Greek proletarians is a general situation in this specific moment when the crisis is clearly breaking out and when the concrete consequences are everywhere to be seen. It is the creation of a common position in the relation of exploitation that did not reach completion during the riots in Greece, but whose dynamic within class struggle was posited: that is, to abolish capital and abolish oneself as a class by acting as a class. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta.*

Crisis theory/theories

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Schematically, the Marxist tradition separated into two large tendencies: on the one side, underconsumptionist theories linked or not to theories of disequilibrium between departments of capitalist production in the reproduction of capital; on the other, theories of the value-functioning of capital founded on the overaccumulation of capital vis-à-vis its valorisation, that is to say on the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. On the one side, all the social democratic orthodoxy or dissidence from Bernstein to Rosa Luxemburg passing through Kautsky and Hilferding¹⁹, on the other, a minority of theoretical snipers like Grossman and Paul Mattick²⁰. If this crisis obliges us to return to these theories, it is because we are confronted by two obvious facts which seem to contradict each other: on the one hand the only coherent Marxist theory of crises is the one developed by Paul Mattick²¹, i.e. the one based on the tendency of the rate of profit to fall; on the other hand this crisis is a crisis of underconsumption (it is rather than ‘appears as’ such). Our principal theoretical confrontation, as productive confrontation, can only engage with the theses of overaccumulation of

19 Bukharin and Lenin refuse the underconsumptionist theses in favour of the disequilibrium between departments of production and in the last analysis in favour of the contradiction between the social character of production and private appropriation.

20 We should equally include in this tendency the so-called State Monopoly Capitalism school led by Paul Boccara.

21 When we don’t give any further indication, we are referring to Paul Mattick (1904–1981) and not to his son Paul Mattick (Jr) who is also a Marxist economic theorist.

capital vis-à-vis its capacity to valorise itself, i.e. with Mattick and his two main works on the question: *Marx and Keynes: The Limits of the Mixed Economy* (1969) and *Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory* (1974).

Mattick affirms the fundamental Marxian thesis on crises but in a one-sided way:

‘From a Marxian point of view, the various existing theories of crises which categorize the problem as either underconsumption or the overproduction of commodities – the one implying the other and both involving the realization problem – only describe the externals of the capitalist crisis mechanism. The periodic overproduction of the means of production and of commodities prevents the realization of surplus-value is, in Marx’s view, only an overproduction of means of production that cannot serve as capital, that is, cannot serve for the exploitation of labor at a given degree of exploitation. And though the overproduction of commodities is an obvious fact, Marx’s theory is not a theory of underconsumption. According to Marx, capitalist production is, and must always be, at variance with the consuming power it brings forth – in periods of prosperity as well as in periods of depression. It is not a “consuming power” growing in proportion to production which explains the increasing social demand for consumption goods in the upswing period of capital development; it is merely the greater number of workers now employed.’²²

It is true that Mattick is reprising here a paragraph of the chapter on *The Internal Contradictions of the Law of the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall*:

‘Over-production of capital is never anything more than overproduction of means of production – of means of labour and necessities of life – which may serve as capital, i.e., may serve to exploit labour at a given degree of exploitation; a fall in the intensity of exploitation below a certain point,

22 Mattick, *Marx and Keynes*

however, calls forth disturbances, and stoppages in the capitalist production process, crises, and destruction of capital.²³

We should note that in this reprise Mattick totally neglects the phenomenon of ‘relative immiseration’ inherent to phases of expansion.²⁴

However: ‘The ultimate reason for all real crises always remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses as opposed to the drive of capitalist production to develop the productive forces as though only the absolute consuming power of society constituted their limit.’²⁵

From the moment when, with the real subsumption of labour under capital, underconsumptionism no longer had any other horizon than the management under different forms of the capitalist mode of production, a revolutionary theory of crises had to be anti-underconsumptionist. Mattick never historicises his point of view, he is content to say that it is the correct Marxian point of view on crises, and that all others are in error. But the ‘return’ to the falling rate of profit is carried out in the critique and the polemic against underconsumptionism and it remains indelibly marked by it in Mattick’s theory. To return in these conditions to the theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall was to develop it in a one-sided way. Mattick thus enclosed himself in an opposition created by himself (in particular historical and ideological conditions). The theory of the

23 Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3.

24 Productive capital grows, the demand for labour-power increases correspondingly. There is “relative immiseration” because the relative wage decreases in proportion to the profits of the capitalist: the interests of capital are always diametrically opposed to those of wage labour. The material situation of the worker has improved, but at the cost of his social position: the augmentation of the power inimical to him. (Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital*).

25 *Capital*, vol. III, part V, Chapter 30. Money-Capital and Real Capital. I.

tendency of the rate of profit to fall imposed itself as the only one able to account for the historical character of the capitalist mode of production and of its obsolescence in a situation where exchange with the outside of the system had become marginal and the reproduction of labour-power was integrated into the reproduction of capital.

The choice of this theory didn't come about by default, it is the only one to resituate the exploitation of the working class at the heart of the contradiction of the system as dynamic and limit of the system itself. The proletariat is understood as a revolutionary class not because it is the suffering class and the best-placed executor of a sentence that the system pronounces against itself, but because it is its own existence and its own role in the system which is at stake in this contradiction which manifests itself in crises. Mattick didn't go as far as de-objectifying the contradiction which is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, but everything was in place for it to be done.

The problem that we have with Mattick is that he remains locked in within this dichotomy, within this antithetical partition in the theory of crises between the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and workers' underconsumption (the question of realisation). 'The tendency [of the rate of profit to fall] ...must at all times appear in the actual events of the market, albeit in modified form'²⁶; for Mattick, the question of realisation is always relegated to the manifest realm of appearance vis-à-vis a true essential reality which is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

'The real barrier of capitalist production is capital itself. It is that capital and its self-expansion appear as the starting and the closing point, the motive and the purpose of production; that production is only production for capital and not vice versa, the means of production are not mere means for a constant expansion of the living process of the society of producers. The limits within which the preservation and self-expansion of

26 Mattick, *Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory*

the value of capital resting on the expropriation and pauperisation of the great mass of producers can alone move – these limits come continually into conflict with the methods of production employed by capital for its purposes, which drive towards unlimited extension of production, towards production as an end in itself, towards unconditional development of the social productivity of labour. The means – unconditional development of the productive forces of society – comes continually into conflict with the limited purpose, the self-expansion of the existing capital. The capitalist mode of production is, for this reason, a historical means of developing the material forces of production and creating an appropriate world-market and is, at the same time, a continual conflict between this its historical task and its own corresponding relations of social production.²⁷

Marx doesn't establish here a contradiction between capitalist production and 'the real social needs' of society (as Mattick maintains in *Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory*), he merely establishes that the capitalist mode of production is a transitory one. 'Real social needs' are not one term of the contradiction; on the contrary, just for the purposes of clarification as to what is being spoken about here and what is not. The contradiction presented here is internal to the capitalist mode of production: the limits within which the preservation and the increase in value have explicitly as their foundation 'the expropriation and immiseration of the great mass of producers', and these limits enter into conflict with the 'unlimited extension of production'.

The relations of distribution and consumption which Marx presents as the other term of the contradiction are explicitly the specific antagonistic relations of capitalist society:

The conditions of direct exploitation, and those of realising it, are not identical. They diverge not only in place and time, but also logically.

27 Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, part III, Chapter 15. Exposition of the Internal Contradictions of the Law

The first are only limited by the productive power of society, the latter by the proportional relation of the various branches of production and the consumer power of society. But this last-named is not determined either by the absolute productive power, or by the absolute consumer power, but by the consumer power based on antagonistic conditions of distribution, which reduce the consumption of the bulk of society to a minimum varying within more or less narrow limits. It is furthermore restricted by the tendency to accumulate, the drive to expand capital and produce surplus-value on an extended scale. (...) But the more productiveness develops, the more it finds itself at variance with the narrow basis on which the conditions of consumption rest.²⁸

These few lines are essential because here overaccumulation and underconsumption are more than related, they are identified as one single contradictory process. The theory of underconsumption is false if one is content to say that the crisis has as its origin the underconsumption of the masses – i.e. if one doesn't justify the latter by the tendency of accumulation, i.e. if one maintains the terms of the contradiction in an external relation the one to the other; in fact the tendency to the unlimited character of production and the underconsumption of the masses are each reciprocally the *raison d'être* of the other: production comes up against the narrow limits of the relations of consumption which are themselves limited by the very characteristics in which the tendency of accumulation is developed. The theory of underconsumption is false and does not permit one to pass to a single theory identifying underconsumption and overaccumulation (the theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall); the theory of overaccumulation is correct, on the condition that it is developed outside the dichotomy of the two theories, and it allows the passage to a single theory.

28 Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, part III, Chapter 15. Exposition of the Internal Contradictions of the Law

The development of the social productiveness of labour is manifested in two ways: first, in the magnitude of the already produced productive forces, the value and mass of the conditions of production under which new production is carried on, and in the absolute magnitude of the already accumulated productive capital; secondly, in the relative smallness of the portion of total capital laid out in wages, i.e., in the relatively small quantity of living labour required for the reproduction and self-expansion of a given capital, for mass production. This also implies concentration of capital.²⁹

If we follow attentively the course of development of the social productivity of labour, we notice that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall inherent in this development is identical to the relative decrease of the part paid out as wages, whereas the mass of production and of the surplus-value that it contains increases in proportion with the development of this social productive power. It follows that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is equally a problem of realisation.

Too many means of labour and necessities of life are produced at times to permit of their serving as means for the exploitation of labourers at a certain rate of profit. Too many commodities are produced to permit of a realisation and conversion into new capital of the value and surplus-value contained in them under the conditions of distribution and consumption peculiar to capitalist production, i.e., too many to permit of the consummation of this process without constantly recurring explosions.

As a general rule the theory of overaccumulation is satisfied to limit itself to the first sentence, to the first part of this quote, forgetting the rest, which is, it is true, only a repetition of the first formulation, a repetition which Marx carries out because his aim is to show, against the economists, who accept an overproduction of capital, that a general overproduction of commodities is not only possible in the capitalist mode of production,

29 Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, part III, Chapter 15. Exposition of the Internal Contradictions of the Law

but further that it is the very same thing as this overproduction of capital. We are not dealing here with a formulation, which, as Mattick suggests with embarrassment, 'represents either an error of judgement or unclear writing'.³⁰

The growth in the mass of the profit which permits accumulation, and therefore the absolute increase in the number of wage workers despite its relative fall, will continue to make the rate of profit fall. Indeed, it is only exceptionally that accumulation does not affect the relation between constant and variable capital. Accumulation aims at an increase in productivity, and, for a new method of production to increase productivity, it must transfer to the commodity, taken by itself, an additional portion of value for the wear and tear of fixed capital smaller than the portion of value saved by the reduction in living labour.³¹ Thus, contrary to appearances, the accumulation made possible by the growth in the mass of profit despite the fall in its rate, even if it multiplies the simultaneous labour days, does not increase workers' consumption in relation to the total production; indeed this is the case as the rate of profit continues to fall. In the process of accumulation, the fall in the rate of profit is always identical to the restriction of workers' consumption. The overaccumulation of capital, that is to say the shortage of surplus-value, in the very mechanism that leads to it, is not only identical, but also has its *raison d'être* in the necessity of workers' underconsumption in relation to the increased mass of production. A scarcity of surplus-value on one side simply means a plethora on the other. The scarcity of surplus-value in terms of its accumulation is its plethora in terms of its realisation; there is no primacy, no causal relation between the two: the fall in the rate of profit is the reduction of necessary

30 Mattick, *Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory*

31 This law expresses the limit to the growth of productive forces in the capitalist mode of production despite its tendency to develop them in an unlimited way.

labour in relation to the increasing mass of capital which is itself necessary to counteract the fall in the rate of profit by increasing its mass.

Too many commodities are produced to permit of a realisation and conversion into new capital of the value and surplus-value contained in them under the conditions of distribution and consumption peculiar to capitalist production...³²

Marx is in no way speaking of an 'absolute power of consumption' here, but rather of the 'power of consumption within a given framework of antagonistic conditions of distribution'³³.

When Mattick explains that one can neither draw from such remarks a crisis theory having an underconsumptionist basis nor make of the realisation of surplus-value the main problem of the capitalist mode of production, he is absolutely right, but only if we accept the separation between the two theses (overaccumulation and overproduction). Within the framework of this separation, Mattick is totally right against the underconsumptionists, but it is the separation that is wrong.

Over-production is specifically conditioned by the general law of the production of capital: to produce to the limit set by the productive forces, that is to say, to exploit the maximum amount of labour with the given amount of capital, without any consideration for the actual limits of the market or the needs backed by the ability to pay; and this is carried out through continuous expansion of reproduction and accumulation, and therefore constant reconversion of revenue into capital, while on the other hand, the mass of the producers remain tied to the average level of

32 Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, part III, Chapter 15. Exposition of the Internal Contradictions of the Law, Penguin, p. 353

33 Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, part III, Chapter 15. Exposition of the Internal Contradictions of the Law, Penguin, p. 352

needs, and must remain tied to it according to the nature of capitalist production.³⁴

Marx might seem to take a purely ‘underconsumptionist’ point of view here, but what is referred to is the overproduction of capital through the ‘constant conversion of revenue into capital’ and the rise in the constant part of capital (this specification, because it is not explicitly formulated, makes Marx’s argumentation appear as purely ‘underconsumptionist’) in this conversion because ‘the mass of producers must necessarily remain limited to an average level of needs because of the nature of capitalist production’. The overproduction of capital is an overproduction of commodities, in relation to the necessary restriction of workers’ consumption that is necessary to increase the accumulated wealth. This restriction is the basis of the overproduction of capital, so long as this restriction is also seen as the continuous growth of constant capital in the ‘reconversion of revenue into capital’.

It is enough to introduce the parameter *c* (constant capital) to unify the theory of crises, i.e. to have a single theory of the crisis at the level of individual capitalists and of all the agents of the production and the circulation, and the crisis at the level of the general laws of accumulation of global capital. The contradiction between ‘production for production’s sake’ and ‘the limited relations of distribution and of consumption’ does not simply derive from the fact that ‘too much revenue was transformed into capital’ (that would be a purely underconsumptionist thesis) but from the fact that, in this transformation, the part corresponding to *c* constantly grows.

What is crucial is that it is possible to explain the identity starting from overaccumulation, but that it is also possible to do it starting from workers’ underconsumption. The aim of capitalist production is, with a given mass of wealth, to make the surplus-product or the surplus-value

34 Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Chapter 17

as great as possible. This aim is reached thanks to an increase in constant capital which is relatively faster than the growth in variable capital, or through the setting in motion of the greatest constant capital possible with the smallest variable capital possible. The same cause (the search for the greatest surplus value possible) produces an increase in the mass of profit and a fall in its rate through the reduction of the funds from which workers take their income. In the reproduction of capital, this reduction becomes the cause preventing the conversion of commodities into new means of increasing the exploitation of labour. In this sense, the relation between overproduction and overaccumulation becomes the following: it is because the fund of workers consumption is constantly reduced in relation to the mass of production, thus starting from underconsumption, that we arrive at the overproduction of capital, that is to say the impossibility of renewing the exploitation of labour in an efficient way. We are not referring here to the possibility of an inversion in the direction of causality in the interplay between overproduction and overaccumulation, because there is no causal relation between the two terms: they are the same phenomenon under two different aspects; through each one we are brought face to face with the other.

In the same chapter of *Capital* dedicated to ‘the law’s internal contradictions’ (a fundamental chapter as far as crisis theory is concerned), Marx writes:

‘The more productivity develops, the more it comes into conflict with the narrow basis on which the relations of consumption rest,’³⁵
and a little bit further:

35 Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, part III, Chapter 15. Exposition of the Internal Contradictions of the Law, Penguin, p. 353

‘Periodically, however, too much is produced in the way of means of labour and means of subsistence, too much to function as means of exploiting the workers at a given rate of profit.’³⁶

What follows this last quote is then explicit:

‘Too many commodities are produced for the value contained in them, and the surplus-value included in this value, to be realised under the conditions of distribution given by capitalist production, and to be transformed back into new capital, i.e. it is impossible to accomplish this process without ever-recurrent explosions’³⁷

If we can produce a unified crisis theory at the level of the static (even if the latter is always a process), we need to put it to the test of the dynamic, i.e. the phases of expansion, reversal and crises, and of ‘ways out of the crisis’. In the dualistic and confrontational framework in which Mattick functions when he exposes the ‘true’ crisis theory, one of his strong arguments, which he uses several times in *Marx and Keynes* as well as in *Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory*, consists in saying that the disproportionality between production and consumption is not only functional during the ‘normal’ course of capitalist accumulation, but also that the ‘way out of the crisis’ is a sharpening of this disproportionality.

In the expansion phase, the fact that the disproportionality is functional means only, as we showed, that the rise in the organic composition of capital is just as much functional. Underconsumption and overproduction of capital are the same contradiction which is immanent to accumulation and which breaks out in crises.

The moment when the cycle of expansion turns into a crisis can first be understood in the relation between rate and mass of profit. If we look at this process in which the fall in the rate is compensated by the increase in capital, one condition for it to succeed is that the mass of total capital

36 Ibid., p. 367

37 Ibid., p. 367

must increase faster than the rate of profit falls. Furthermore, not only must the increase in the mass of capital be faster than the fall in the rate of profit, this is not enough. Within a rising organic composition, in order to use as much variable capital, or even better, more variable capital, the constant part of capital must proportionally increase more than the total capital necessary to compensate the fall in the rate of profit by its mass. Therefore, a larger and larger fraction of revenue is transformed into constant capital.

Thus the process of compensating the fall in the rate by increasing the mass of capital, which explains simultaneously the possibility of prosperity and the necessity of it giving way to crisis, is, once more, absolutely identical to the growing disproportionality between production and consumption through which the process can continue, and to this very disproportionality between production and consumption that breaks out in the crisis. The immanent contradiction which had been developing in prosperity breaks out in the crisis. The absolute fall in the profitability of capital breaks out in the crisis: too much revenue has been transformed into capital, and, to be more precise, into constant capital; overaccumulation is overproduction, overproduction is overaccumulation.

Sometimes, Mattick comes close to this unification of the crisis theories:

‘The general competition thus leads to a more rapid growth of the constant versus the variable capital [...]. It is this very process that makes possible the realization of surplus value by way of accumulation, without respect for the restriction of consumption this presupposes. Surplus value becomes new capital, which in its turn produces capital. This process, senseless as it is, is actually the consequence of a mode of production oriented exclusively toward the production of surplus value. All good things come to an end, however, and this same process finds its nemesis in the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. At a certain point the realization of surplus value by accumulation is halted, when accumulation ceases

to yield the surplus value necessary for the continuation of the process. Then it suddenly becomes apparent that without accumulation a part of the surplus value can not be realized, since demand is insufficient to transform the surplus value lying hidden in the commodities into profit.³⁸

But two pages later, Mattick puts forward the following hypothesis:

‘If the amount of surplus value created in production was great enough to hasten accumulation even more, the increased consumption would be no hindrance to further accumulation but could grow together with it.’³⁹

It should be said that this hypothesis is not coherent because of “the restriction of consumption this (accumulation) presupposes”. Mattick comes often very close to a unification of the crisis theories, but the fundamental dualism in which he functions always makes him retreat slightly when he thinks he has gone too far.

We must now examine the question of the ‘way out of the crisis’, because it contains one of Mattick’s main arguments in favour of the pre-eminence of overaccumulation over the overproduction of commodities, the latter seen as a secondary effect.

Against the underconsumptionist theory, Mattick insists on the fact that crises end not by a decrease but by an increase in production and that this increase is due to a heightened exploitation of labour. The realisation of surplus-value takes place through a new impetus given to accumulation and Mattick stresses that the curbing of the crisis takes place through an increased imbalance between the production and the realisation of surplus-value, between production and consumption: ‘(To overcome the crisis) more of the social labour must fall to capital, less to the workers.’⁴⁰ This

38 Mattick, *Economic crisis and crisis theory*, p. 68–69. (our emphasis – R.S).

39 Ibid.

40 Mattick, *Economic crisis and crisis theory*, p. 64.

is for Mattick the definitive argument disqualifying underconsumptionist theories. In a non-unified crisis theory, this argument is peremptory.

It is the parameter c (constant capital) that should be examined because it is the one which unifies the crisis theories. The way out of the crisis implies that, in the crisis itself, two processes are taking place: first, an increase in exploitation, that is to say in the rate of surplus value (s/v), second, a devalorisation of constant capital, both fixed and circulating (raw materials, etc.), a phenomenon to which Mattick does not give the attention it deserves.⁴¹ What results is a restoration of the rate of profit “from both sides”: a rise in surplus value, fall in the value of constant capital and even of variable capital (the crisis has had an effect on the level of wages). The devalorisation of c has no lower limit, and it is possible to take over a company for a token one Euro or Dollar. As for the fall in v , it is limited by the bare survival of the workers. If c and v have both been devalorised, the devalorisation of c is superior to the devalorisation of v . From this results not only a fall in $c+v$, but also a fall in the organic composition of capital, this being reinforced by a very important phenomenon in the way out of the crisis: a concentration of devalorised capital.

A large part of the nominal capital of the society, i.e., of the exchange-value of the existing capital, is once for all destroyed, although this very destruction, since it does not affect the use-value, may very much expedite the new reproduction.⁴²

41 To be precise, Mattick speaks about this mechanism (in Marx and Keynes) but without underlining the imbalance which then takes place, in the crisis, between the devalorisation of c and the devalorisation of v , and therefore its effect on the rate of profit.

42 Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Chapter 17. In the same passage, Marx specifies that a stoppage in production can equally lead to a real destruction of capital: machines are stopped and go rusty, buildings are left half-built, commodities rot, etc.

The capacity of capital to absorb a certain quantity of labour and therefore to valorise itself depends on its use value and not on its exchange value. The same capital can have been divided by ten in terms of its exchange value and still set in motion the same quantity of labour. During the crisis, the devalorisation of the two fractions of productive capital do not obey the same laws; the devalorisation of c always tends to be greater than the devalorisation of v .

We previously tried to show that it was the evolution of c (the rising organic composition) which identifies the tendency of the rate of profit to fall with workers' underconsumption (and vice versa). The way out of the crisis comes through a rise in the rate of exploitation and not through the giving out of money to workers, but the organic composition of capital is modified in favour of v . Accumulation resumes, but the part of revenue that society transforms into constant capital has fallen. Indeed, the way out of the crisis does not come from an increase in workers' purchasing power, as the underconsumptionists would have it (and this would imply an absurd situation in which workers were able to buy back a part of the surplus value that was extorted from them) but the rate of profit is restored by an increase in the surplus value and by a modification of the organic composition of capital which reduces the part of revenue transformed into constant capital. In this way the disproportionality between consumption and production has not been abolished, but the restoration of the rate of profit is identical to the growth, in relation to total production, of the part of revenue assigned to consumption.

We must now sum up this long discussion on crisis theory. The imbalance between the mass of production (in terms of value) to be realised and the consumptive power of society really is an imbalance to the extent that, if production cannot be realised, that is to say if it cannot function as additional capital (transformed into c and v) at the required rate of profit, the reason for this lies in workers' underconsumption, i.e. in the

relative and/or absolute reduction of v (variable capital) in relation to c (constant capital). The same phenomenon, which is the rise in the organic composition of capital, is on one side a fall in the rate of profit and on the other side a structurally necessary reduction of workers' consumption. The latter, i.e. the capitalist relations of distribution, the law of the wage, is by definition the law of the rising organic composition. Workers' underconsumption (in relation to the value produced) and fall in the rate of profit are absolutely identical. Workers' underconsumption means the necessity of increasing the part of production necessary for accumulation under the form of constant capital and the reduction of variable capital; that is to say that the very mechanism of capitalist accumulation is by definition an imbalance between the consumptive power of society and the growth in production. This means (to say it in another way) that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is substantially identical to workers' underconsumption in relation to the growth of production according to the laws of capital.

The question of realisation and the problems of circulation are not a consequence of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall; the halt in accumulation provoked by an increased mass to be valorised is only the growing imbalance between v and c in the division of production between the part that is consumed and the part intended for accumulation, an imbalance that reaches a limit-point. The growth in the part of production intended for accumulation, that is to say, the rise in c and the fall in v , is, on the one hand, the very process of the fall in the rate of profit and, on the other hand, it is this imbalance between the mass of the value produced and the consumptive power of society according to the laws of distribution of the capitalist mode of production that are only the reciprocal movement of c and v (to the extent that society can be said to consist only of productive workers and capitalists, which is not the case, fortunately for the surplus value eaters). This growing imbalance is itself

absolutely identical to the rise in the organic composition. The crisis brought about by the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is by definition and by cause an underconsumptionist crisis which is itself given, i.e. it only exists, because it is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. We are here beyond something that is and that manifests itself as (Mattick). What is considered at the level of realisation is nothing else than the rise in the organic composition which itself is nothing else than the result of the growing imbalance between v and c , an imbalance which has its roots in the necessary growth of surplus value which is in its very cause the reduction of v : the root of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

The scarcity of surplus value in relation to accumulation is its plethora in relation to its realisation: there is no primacy here. The fall in the rate of profit is the reduction of necessary labour in relation to the rising mass of capital and the multiplication of production to compensate for the fall in the rate by the mass. Not enough surplus value is produced: this means that this surplus value can not be realised. Indeed, the insufficient production of surplus value means that the conversion into c was too great, it also means (by definition and simultaneously), absolutely and relatively, that the necessary labour that regulates the consumption of the mass of the producers has fallen relatively and absolutely too low (there is no cause–effect relation between the two, the scarcity of surplus value is identical to its plethora).

The ultimate cause behind all real crises always remains the poverty of the masses and the restriction of their consumption, which is only the fall of the rate of profit when the growth in the rate of surplus value no longer compensates for this fall. The ultimate cause behind all real crises remains always the fall in the rate of profit which is only the poverty of the masses and the restriction of their consumption.

It is fundamental to produce the unity of crisis theories in order to define the current crisis. The current crisis is a crisis of the wage relation,

both as the capacity of capital to valorise itself and as the capacity of the reproduction of the working class as such. It is a crisis of realisation, a crisis that exists as underconsumption (exists as rather than manifests itself as). There are three reasons for this: low productivity, a low level of investment, and the modalities of exploitation of labour power. This last point sums up the others because it is the synthesis of all the characteristics of restructured capitalism. Because it is restructured capitalism specifically that has gone into crisis. Whether one considers the transformations in the labour market, the modalities of the exploitation of labour power in the immediate labour process, the social and collective reproduction of this labour power, the financial globalisation of capital, the transformation of surplus value into additional capital, the contradictions and the limits currently exploding are the same ones which previously constituted the dynamic of the system and which defined the conditions of its development. To consider this crisis as the late outcome of the crisis of the beginning of the 70s ignores the restructuring of capital which took place, that is to say the change from one cycle of struggle to the next.

Gender distinction, programmatisation and communisation

2010 (TC 23)

ROLAND SIMON

Given the subject, I feel obliged to signal that throughout this text I have exempted myself from the task, irksome both to writing and reading, of feminising adjectives, nouns, pronouns and participles. When necessary, the reader will do this for her/himself.

INTRODUCTION: MEN, WOMEN AND COMMUNISATION

The revolution as communisation is borne by this cycle of struggles, which produces its characteristics; as such, however, it is predicated on the abolition of the gender distinction. There is no abolition of the division of labour, no abolition of exchange and of value, no abolition of work (the non-coincidence of individual activity and social activity), no abolition of the family, no immediacy of relations between individuals which define them in their singularity, without the abolition of men and women. There can be no self-transformation of proletarians into individuals living as singular individuals, without the abolition of sexual identities. All the measures of communisation will not succeed if they do not resolve this question by specifically attacking it and by abolishing its very terms.

As long as a relation between men and women exists, there cannot be an immediacy of relations between individuals defining them in their singularity; in fact a social construction will present itself as natural and a division in society which subsumes singular individuals will be taken for granted. As a result of this general, abstract division, which appears

as a given, all other divisions will be preserved because this division is constructed by all the others, even if it does not as such define any relation of production nor any mode of production.

We have to be able to think of the social process through which we can arrive at a situation where the distinction between the sexes no longer has any social pertinence. That is the question. I will begin by the social construction of the group women, then I will study the economic dimension of the relation between men and women in the capitalist mode of production, and finally I will end on the question of the abolition of the gender distinction in programmatism and in the revolution as communisation.

I) THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE GROUP WOMEN

We have to understand how the relation between men and women is itself constructed in order to understand the abolition of its terms. In order to understand how this relation is constructed, we must not have as our starting-point (biological) reproduction and the specific place of women in this reproduction (Françoise Héritier), but rather what renders this place specific and gives it a social meaning: the modes of production up to today. The historically recurring character of the appropriation of women expresses the recurrence, in all modes of production up to today, of the augmentation of the population as the principal productive force, which is no more a natural relation than any other economic relation of production, and which is not found without the sundering of society into workers and non-workers.

The appropriation of this productive force implies the appropriation of the person who is its bearer. Appropriated as a person, she is not a socially recognised entity, able to be socially recognised as such, which implies the appropriation of the totality of her activity; here we see the creation of, and the passage to, the category of domestic labour (which stands in no

necessary relation with any type of concrete activity). We don't have as our starting-point a presupposed category, "women", in order to explain why they are dominated, instead our starting-point is domination, a historical social relation, which produces "women".

Women produce children, but there is nothing more natural about the way that this fact comes to define a "social entity" than any other characteristic or determination. If "making children" becomes the definition of a group of persons, women, then that is a pure social construction. The increase in the population as principal productive force allows us to consider biological differences in reproduction as something to which a social relation gives meaning; these differences are not waiting to be given a meaning, rather they are entirely socially constructed as difference. This construction implies the appropriation of women and their submission to this function.

It is this appropriation that we call "gender". If gender didn't exist, what we call sex would be denuded of meaning, and would not be considered important: it would only be a physical difference like the others. Gender is not a social construction erected on the basis of groups already constituted by nature. What is physical (and is not in doubt), is not the substratum of gender, it is gender which creates the sexes, or in other words, gives meaning to physical traits which no more possess an intrinsic meaning than the rest of the physical universe. But the constructed distinction (the physical traits) is pertinent for the distinction itself. Having established this, we must dismiss any "anthropology of origins"; the true starting-point for the understanding of this construction is the point where this question can appear because it does appear as a question – and this point is the capitalist mode of production: its contradictory relation to labour and to population (see below).

We cannot leave to one side as if unimportant the fact that the social definition of genders defines the sexes. When the social distinction introduces

an anatomical distinction, that is to say when an anatomical distinction is constructed as a social distinction, when it makes sense, we have to treat it as such: an anatomical distinction which makes sense. The perception of humanity as divided between potential bearers of children and non-bearers is no “spontaneous perception”, it is a social construction, but once this social construction has been made effective, we can affirm that there are two sexes and only two. It is an objective social construction. The placing of reproductive logic in a structuring position, which is characteristic of all modes of production (and which is a social construction) reduces a complex ensemble of physical variables to a dichotomous classification, socially constructed and imposed if necessary.

If all societies until today rest on the increase in population as principal force of production, it is because they are class societies. The resulting social division between workers and non-workers is immediately coupled with another division which is internal to it, but whose terms do not correspond to this division: a gendered division of society. In fact, up until capital, including where the thing starts to get contradictory, the principal source of surplus-labour is of course labour which entails the increase in the population. The necessary appropriation of surplus-labour, which is a purely social phenomenon, (surplus-labour can not be attributed to any supposed surplus productivity of labour) creates genders and the social pertinence of their sexual distinction. It is surplus-labour which structures the two partitions: workers/non-workers and men/women. There aren't two class systems because there aren't two modes of production and because there is only one surplus-labour. In fact, there is no surplus-labour without a gendered division of humanity. The contradiction between workers and non-workers and the contradiction between men and women are corollaries, and are not superimposed upon each other. The second contradiction, while it does not define any specific mode of production, is no less a specific contradiction which can't be reduced to

the first. “Patriarchy” has never been a relation of production, nor a mode of production. The history of patriarchy is an optical illusion, just as much as, at a different level, the history of the State, of religion, of art... If there is no history of patriarchy, nor even a history of the relation between men and women, it’s because what we are dealing with is a relation which is specifically reproduced each time by each mode of production which is its condition. The relation between men and women is consubstantial with the very existence of exploitation and surplus labour. Surplus labour is the concept which structures the two divisions without confusing them (proletarians/capitalists and men/women). In the capitalist mode of production an error would be committed if one were to establish the succession of economic categories in the sequence in which they were historically decisive.

The appropriation of the principal force of production and the source of surplus labour is carried out by all men as a result of the simple gendered distinction in society. But not all men draw profit from this in an identical fashion (both in terms of quantity and quality) and to the same degree according to their place in the division between worker and non-worker.

II) THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF THE RELATION BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CAPITALIST MODE OF PRODUCTION

1) DOMESTIC LABOUR/NECESSARY LABOUR/SURPLUS LABOUR

The attachment of the female spouse (and children) to the class of the husband is theoretically and socially valid. In terms of this question, to remain within the definition of classes on the basis of the distribution of the means of production (Marx’s “first distribution”) is inadequate. The relation between classes is one which reproduces itself, presupposes itself; hence it is a relation which includes within itself all the conditions

for its own renewal. Wages are the value of the reproduction of labour-power and of the “race of labourers” (Wages, Prices and Profit), and not the payment of the “value of labour” (an absurd expression). The relation of dependence (the relation of maintenance that women find themselves in) is the very product of the wage as reproduction of labour-power rather than as the “payment of labour”. The wage presupposes and reproduces on its own basis the family and its relations of dependence. This relation of dependence is not another relation of production because it has no autonomy and no principle of its own renewal (cf. Theories of Surplus-Value). If the male spouse does not return to work, he cannot renew the operation vis-à-vis his wife: his exploitation of his wife does not produce the conditions of its own renewal.

Only a non-programmatic theory of the class struggle and a theory of revolution as the abolition of all classes, as the abolition of the proletariat and the wage-form can take into account the internal antagonism included within the wage as reproduction of labour-power and, what’s more, consider that this internal antagonism is and will have to be a determining element in the abolition of the wage.

To say that the wage pays for the reproduction of labour-power and the “race of labourers” takes us across the threshold of “intimacy”. Even if there is not any free [gratuit] productive labour in the family-sphere, by the very nature of the wage, the family is the site of an economic exploitation, that of women, which benefits first the male spouse, that is to say men in general. We have here a relation of domination which flows from the nature of the wage: the domination and the provision of domestic labour depending in the first instance on the existence of surplus-labour and, secondly, on the very content of the wage relation.

We have to beware of something which seems obvious but which is false: “women carry out domestic labour”. No, it is rather the labour carried out by women which, because it is carried out by them, within a certain

relation, is domestic labour. Thus domestic labour does not encompass a list of concrete labours which are defined prior to their assignation to women (at best men help – participate – in domestic labour). By definition domestic labour is sexed, it isn't labour which is undertaken inside the "home", but rather labour which is carried out by the person who, being in a relation of dependence, belongs to the "home" as a social structure. If the labour of women is in this sense domestic labour, this means that the fundamental definition of the group "women" by their appropriation as persons excludes their activity from the field of social relations. She who is appropriated as a person produces nothing which can be detached from her as object or activity as her property and enter into the general field of the economy. It is domestic labour, the work of women, and as such it is excluded from the economy. This labour can sometimes be undertaken by men, but it remains female labour; a society, simply because it is the reproduction of itself and thus "survives" the individuals which compose it, is a structure of positions and functions before being an ensemble of concrete individuals. Women carry out labour which, in a determinate mode of production and by virtue of the determinations of this mode of production, does not create value; it is not by chance that it is assigned to them. The appropriation of women, which is inherent to all modes of production including capitalism, generates domestic labour within the social structure of this appropriation: the family. This labour does not create value, and it is not productive labour.

Value is a social relation and abstract labour only exists as a general system of the exchange of commodities (Rubin). A product or a service which is neither bought nor exchanged (and which moreover, is not destined for exchange), is not value. If domestic labour created a certain type of value, it would have to be possible for us to talk of socially necessary abstract domestic labour. No social metabolism permits the determination of an hour of abstract domestic labour or the value of a woman's hour

in the household. To the extent that this labour is not mediated by the market, no social mechanism permits the estimation of the number of hours of domestic labour which are necessary on average to produce the food for a family and to tend to the upkeep of the home (the hourly cost of replacement labour-power cannot be a satisfactory mode of calculation, as the norms and rhythms of the carrying-out of labour and the concrete reality of the finished product being researched are difficult to compare).

But, it will be said, this labour produces a commodity: "it produces labour-power, a commodity which is then exchanged, therefore it produces value." No. It is not productive of value because its own product, or its own services, which are instrumental to the production of labour-power, don't themselves enter into any relation of exchange with the depositary of labour-power and cannot do so through their completion in the domestic sphere. We can lament this, we can combat this situation, we can demand that there be a relation of exchange, but for as long as this is not the case, this activity will never be productive of value. Domestic labour does not enter into the determination of the value of the labour-power which is reproduced, which effectively gives the capitalist a present to the capitalist who buys this labour-power at its value. This labour-time is useful, indispensable even for the reproduction of labour-power, and furthermore it has for the capitalist the immense advantage that it is expended within a social relation, the conjugal relation, such that it does not produce value.

There is another reason. The reproduction of the person, the female spouse, is included within the value of this labour-power; what is included is not the price of her labour (which doesn't exist for anyone), but that of her reproduction, whatever form this remuneration ("maintenance"), and the relation of domination which corresponds to this remuneration, then takes in the family (and this is pre-determined). If there were to be any pretence of "paying her for her labour", ("wages for housework"),

she would only be paid, like everybody else, the cost of her reproduction and not her labour. What she received directly would have to be deducted from the value of the labour-power of her husband. The same thing cannot be paid for twice. This might be considered a sort of “progress” for her, but the real economic relation would not be modified by this (the husband could be assigned the task by the State or the enterprise of verifying the proper provision of the service for which the female spouse is directly remunerated; in the case of exchange-relations, the worst case scenario often applies).

Unlike any other commodity, labour-power “realises” its value by being bought only to the extent that it produces its equivalent in the production process. The worker has to produce the value that he receives for his reproduction, for his labour-power; it is in the capitalist production process that the worker produces the equivalent of the value of his labour-power. The commodity labour-power has to be sold and consumed as productive of value in order to realise its value. It has a value, but no counterpart to this value exists before the worker produces it. “In the household”, the worker consumes finished products as use-values and the labour of his spouse as a particular labour, as concrete labour. As far as the value of labour-power is concerned, it is in the process of production that he produces its equivalent. The labour of the female spouse does not immediately create the funds against which she is maintained, unlike the worker producing household electrical goods, who immediately (on condition of sale) creates the funds against which he is paid.

This peculiarity of the realisation of labour-power (whereby it only realises its value to the extent that it produces its equivalent) is only another way of conceiving capitalist circulation. Capitalist circulation implies that the transmission of the value of the products consumed by labour-power occurs without the modification of value. In other words, capitalist circulation defines as non-value creating the worker’s consumption and

the acts which accompany it. This consumption appears in this circulation as a pure phenomenon of circulation between capitalists.

The modalities according to which the transformation of these goods into the reproduction of the value-producing machine is effected are the free gift that domestic labour constantly makes to the capitalist for the simple reason that one is the capitalist and the other the worker. Thus it is not in the simple framework of exchange and the production of value that we have to approach the question of domestic labour within capitalism, but rather in the framework of the wage, i.e. the relation between necessary and surplus labour. Domestic labour does not create value, but it increases the surplus value captured by the capitalist who exchanges the wage for labour-power. The wage pays the value of the commodities entering into the reproduction of labour-power, which neither includes the labour-time necessary for their further elaboration post-purchase (e.g. cooking or assembling IKEA furniture) nor the labour-time necessary for their maintenance to preserve them as use-values. It is only from the point of view of the capitalist who pays the wage that this labour-time is (cost-) free labour. It is a reduction of necessary labour-time corresponding to the worker's consumption and reproduction. For the bearer and seller of labour-power, the labour of his spouse only creates 'free time'. It does not create any additional value when compared to what the value of his labour-power would be if he himself take care of its reproduction.

At the time of the frantic introduction of women into industry with the development of mechanisation, capitalists quickly became aware, as women now found themselves unable to carry out domestic labour, that the latter reduced necessary labour and increased surplus-labour. The increase in surplus labour that capital absorbed by the multiplication of simultaneous working-days with the introduction of women into the production process also generated a counter-tendency: the increase in

workers' expenditure on their reproduction and thus the necessary labour-time for the reproduction of the labour-powers of the worker-family.

With the transformation of all the members of the family into exploitable labour-power, in the chapter of Volume one of *Capital* on large-scale industry, Marx writes:

Since certain family functions, such as nursing and suckling children, cannot be entirely suppressed, the mothers confiscated by capital, must try substitutes of some sort. Domestic work, such as sewing and mending, must be replaced by the purchase of ready-made articles. Hence, the diminished expenditure of labour in the house is accompanied by an increased expenditure of money. The cost of keeping the family increases, and balances the greater income. In addition to this, economy and judgment in the consumption and preparation of the means of subsistence becomes impossible. (Emphasis added).

All this, adds Marx, has been concealed by official Political Economy. In another note, he points out that “we see how capital, for the purposes of its self-expansion, has usurped the labour necessary in the home of the family.” (Emphasis added). Domestic labour diminishes the necessary labour-time and thus augments the part of the working-day which is composed of surplus labour.

Capital has at its disposal three ways of “usurping” this domestic labour-time, either by leaving it as it is as domestic labour (in this case it usurps it as a reduction in the part of the working day which composed of necessary labour), or by absorbing this time (i.e. by absorbing women), in which case necessary labour-time will increase in the long-term, or by combining the two, and looking to gain on both fronts. The third solution is of course the one held in highest regard by the capitalist. For more than 20 years, the “solution” has been part-time working, which has been imposed in the immense majority of cases.

To the extent that capital does not itself produce the norm of consumption, the commodities entering into workers' consumption, and the way their life is framed according to social relations and techniques which reduce the value of this consumption, the massification of labour-power caused by machinery and large-scale industry brings with it, after an initial period of capitalist euphoria, the rising cost of the reproduction of labour-power. The essential accomplishment of Fordism is to overcome these rising costs, but now it is the family framework as the framework of reproduction which is undermined, it is now merely a mediating term between an individual labour-power which counts only as an aliquot part of the available social labour-power and this total available social labour-power itself. The state is initially the guarantor of the general reproduction of the total available social labour-power, before this reproduction acquires a form adequate to capital in becoming the business of individual capitals (e.g. insurance, training, collective agreements at the level of industries and enterprises, the distribution of coupons...). Currently the attack on all indirect forms of the wage, and on public services whose function in part is to substitute for certain domestic tasks, means that the burden of reproduction now has to be transferred on to a different (domestic?) social relation. The consequences of such a transferral are difficult to predict at the moment.

Women work too and the capitalist mode of production has to combine female labour in such a way that labour and domestic labour are articulated with each other so that each creates the conditions necessary to compel the other to be carried out. Even when the great majority of women work, we can still say that their relation to their reproduction remains that of "maintenance" (Delphy). The couple does not have the same objective sense for him and for her; the labour-market propels women into marriage: the most profitable career (even while working). The asymmetry precedes the association, and is the cause of the association. The female wage functions

as “second wage” (this is possible because what is the determining factor is the wage as reproduction of the family’s labour-power) and through this women are reinscribed within the framework of domestic labour, through which the capitalist profits via the value of labour-power.

The labour-market is purely capitalist (and not “patriarchal” and capitalist), because the place of women assigned to domestic labour in addition to domestic labour is also purely capitalist. So purely capitalist is it that it is precisely the necessities of the valorisation of capital which modulate the entry and departure of women’s labour from its pure localisation within the domestic sphere, without ever giving them dispensation from it.

The appropriation of women as producers of the principal productive force (the increase in the population) implies the appropriation of the person who produces it and as a result the appropriation of all her activity insofar as the appropriation of her person excludes her from society. Domestic labour cannot be captured by the capitalist (via the value of labour-power) without a relation of domination which all men exercise. “Free time” and the sexed division of the labour-market are the reverse effects of the constraint by which alone domestic labour is carried out. This free time results from domination and not exploitation; exploitation occurs elsewhere even if it includes this domination as one of its moments (as the appropriation of the increase in the population as a force of production and the devaluation of labour-power). In the capitalist mode of production, the exclusion of women from the public realm is more radical than in preceding modes of production. Capitalism defines productive labour as absolutely separated from all the reproductive activities of the private sphere. The free labour-power which bears this productive labour is compelled to go and sell itself. The schism between production and reproduction, between abode and place of production is perfect, structural, and definitive of the mode of production founded on the free worker. The conjugal family is the family of the free worker, *pace Engels* (see below). The domestic space is defined

socially as exclusion, as reclusion. At a certain moment women can enter into the labour-market, but only on the basis of this exclusion. Their entry into the labour-market, their participation in productive labour will always be defined as the labour of “those-who-exist-like-that-in-exclusion” and the value of whose labour-power is thus devalued.

2) MODE OF PRODUCTION/SURPLUS LABOUR/MEN-WOMEN/RELATION OF DOMINATION

The economic result of domestic labour is materialised in the division of the working-day. But the possibility of this decrease of necessary labour-time and the correlated rise in surplus labour is exterior to the labour-process itself. This increase in surplus labour cannot be confused on its own account with the labour-process, and this is why it needs something else other than the economic relation in order to exist. This relation of domination we can call “patriarchy” on the condition that we don’t fall into an anthropological illusion of a history of patriarchy. For this reason we have to quickly come back to the matrix of relations of production in a mode of production and to the question of how relations of domination can be developed on the basis of the capitalist relation.

The concept of relation of production designates the social relations that men maintain among each other in the process of production of their material conditions of existence. The coherent ensemble of these relations constitutes a mode of production. As mode of production, this coherent ensemble of relations of production includes the articulation of instances of domination and representation of the society as totality, i.e. the alienation of the individual from his community inherent in all the forms of exploitation (religion, the State, politics, kinship...). Taken historically (chronologically), the relations of production are prior, whereas theoretically, conceptually, the mode of production is prior. Even if historically the commodity, money, rent or credit exist prior to

the capitalist mode of production, it is the capitalist mode of production which defines what the commodity, wage labour, capital, credit, rent etc are.

A mode of production is the result of the interplay of three elements: workers, non-workers, and conditions of production. The third element is divided into two: means of production, and means of subsistence. Between these three elements, there can exist three types of relations: property, possession and separation. Each combination can operate as process in two ways: the coincidence between the labour process and the extraction of surplus-labour, and non-coincidence. The modes of production founded on non-coincidence are those in which exploitation cannot be effective, cannot be realised, without being domination. These modes of production essentially operate through domination, exploitation includes domination. This isn't the case with capitalism.

It is necessary to define the concepts of "domination" and "exploitation". Exploitation is a strict concept: appropriation by the non-worker of an accumulable material surplus, reproducing and/or expanding the fund, thus permitting the renewal of the operation. Domination is a much more vague and polysemous. There is domination when the worker is a particular individual, i.e. whose belonging to a given community presupposes the carrying-out of his activity, which generally includes the (spatial or temporal) disjunction of labour-time into necessary labour-time and surplus labour-time. Domination is equally, for the same reasons, an ideological process. In fact if exploitation acquires a self-evident character in this situation, it is at the cost of the ideology which corresponds to the membership of the community.

However relations of domination can be redeveloped on the basis of capitalist exploitation. This occurs in two ways: firstly on the basis of, and in, exploitation itself, precisely in the way in which the three moments of exploitation are articulated (the face-off between labour-power and capital as potential capital; the subsumption of labour under capital; and

the transformation of surplus-value into additional capital). Secondly, on the basis of existing disjunctions, in the capitalist mode of production itself, between the labour process and the increase in surplus-labour – i.e. on the basis which conceptually determines domination. The never finished character of the transformation of surplus-value into additional capital and the disjunctions between the labour process and the growth in surplus labour have the effect that capital reappears within the relation of exploitation as domination, as an exterior constraint on the individual.

On the one hand in exploitation we have the general possibility of a relation of domination, and on the other, the way in which we have defined the insertion of domestic labour into the relation between necessary and surplus labour means that it cannot increase surplus labour without being implicated within a relation of domination. The domestic relation is included within the salary which is the reproduction of labour-power and the “race of workers”. As a result of the very disjunction between the labour process in which labour-power is consumed productively and that modality of increasing surplus labour represented by domestic labour, its effect cannot be captured by the capitalist without a relation of domination. The relation between men and women is not reducible to the contradiction between classes; men don’t act as foremen on behalf of the true boss, the capitalist; rather, they act on their own behalf as men. Male domination does not mediate capitalist domination. If this domination increases surplus labour, it is because surplus labour and male domination, the appropriation of women and their activity are given at the same time and belong to the same concept of surplus labour. But it is exactly here that the capitalist mode of production has a problem with women.

3) THE CAPITALIST MODE OF PRODUCTION HAS A PROBLEM WITH WOMEN

The capitalist mode of production is the first mode of production which has a problem with labour and the increase in the population as the “principal force of production”.

It is a law of capital, as we saw, to create surplus labour, disposable time; it can do this only by setting necessary labour in motion – i.e. entering into exchange with the worker. It is its tendency, therefore, to create as much labour as possible; just as it is equally its tendency to reduce necessary labour to a minimum. It is therefore equally a tendency of capital to increase the labouring population, as well as constantly to posit a part of it as surplus population – population which is useless until such time as capital can utilize it. (Hence the correctness of the theory of surplus population and surplus capital.) [...] (Capital) can leap over the natural limit formed by one individual’s living, working day, at a given stage in the development of the forces of production (and it does not in itself change anything that this stage is changing) only by positing another working day alongside the first at the same time – by the spatial addition of more simultaneous working days. [...] This is why capital solicits the increase of population; and the very process by means of which necessary labour is reduced makes it possible to put new necessary labour (and hence surplus labour) to work.

This still without regard to the fact that the increase in population increases the productive force of labour, since it makes possible a greater division and combination of labour etc. The increase of population is a natural force of labour, for which nothing is paid. From this standpoint, we use the term natural force to refer to the social force. All natural forces of social labour are themselves historical products. [...] Hence the tendency of capital simultaneously to increase the labouring population as well as to reduce constantly its necessary part (constantly to posit a part of it as reserve). And the increase of population itself the chief means for reducing the necessary part. At bottom this is only an application of the relation

of the single working day. (Marx, Grundrisse, The Chapter on Capital, Increase of surplus labour time. Increase of simultaneous working days (Population), Penguin Edition, p.399)

As a result of the definition of the working population as productive force, the categories men and women are simultaneously always reproduced – they are absolutely not contingent (these are not “behavioural choices” – Butler); however, with the capitalist mode of production, these categories are no longer merely given, because it is the population as principal force of production which, with capital, is no longer merely given.

The conditions under which individuals have intercourse with each other, so long as the above-mentioned contradiction is absent, are conditions appertaining to their individuality, in no way external to them; conditions under which these definite individuals, living under definite relationships, can alone produce their material life and what is connected with it, are thus the conditions of their self-activity and are produced by this self-activity. The definite condition under which they produce, thus corresponds, as long as the contradiction has not yet appeared, to the reality of their conditioned nature, their one-sided existence, the one-sidedness of which only becomes evident when the contradiction enters on the scene and thus exists for the later individuals. Then this condition appears as an accidental fetter, and the consciousness that it is a fetter is imputed to the earlier age as well. (Marx, The German Ideology, Part I: Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook D. Proletarians and Communism)

With the capitalist mode of production, the contradiction “has appeared” (that of the population as the principal force of production), but it is impossible to escape this contradiction without abolishing this mode of production. This mode of production is preparing within its breast a class struggle which, in abolishing capital, will not be able to escape the question, for each of us, of “conditions inherent to our individuality”; this question is determined by the “appearance of this contradiction”

which is to be surpassed, i.e. in this case being a “man” or a “woman”. The appearance as contradiction of the gendered reproduction of humanity is identical to the contradictory relation of capital and labour within the capitalist mode of production, i.e. it is identical to capital as contradiction in process⁴³. It is for this reason that we should be looking to show that it is in female labour as it is currently that all the contradictions are bound up.

III) THE ABOLITION OF THE GENDER DISTINCTION

1) PROGRAMMATISM LOVES WOMEN

The specific exploitation of women as such in the capitalist mode of production cannot be compared to racist modes of exploitation of labour-power insofar as the exploitation of women touches on the very nature of the capitalist mode of production in its relation to labour; it is linked to the definition of the value of labour-power – in its concept – and to the definition of surplus labour and the self-contradictory relation of capital to labour and the population. If Marxism and anarchism, and the workers’ movement in general, always had a problem with women, it’s because without a supersession of programmatism this specificity is simply impossible to formulate, it is invisible, outside the field of what is possible.

Only a non-programmatic theory of the class struggle and a theory of revolution as abolition of all classes, and thus of the proletariat and the wage-form, can take into account the internal antagonism included in the wage as reproduction of labour-power and, furthermore, consider that this internal antagonism is and will be a determining element of the abolition of the wage-form. It is necessary to develop a critique of the capitalist mode of production, and a non-programmatic theory of revolution, both of which do not consider labour and the increase of the

43 Marx, Grundrisse, The Chapter on Capital, Transition from the process of the production of capital into the process of circulation, Penguin Edition, p.414

population as the natural facts of all human production, in order to grasp that it is a social construction which makes the difference and gives the meaning to the differentiation of biological functions of reproduction. Programmatism makes this question into a pre-historical or pre-theoretical element (the natural division of labour); radical feminism (non-essentialist or differentialist) makes this into a naturalist theoretical taboo.

In its specificity, the female struggle is the condition sine qua non of the supersession of the programmatic class struggle. In the capitalist mode of production the common position of men vis-à-vis female labour defines the position of the waged worker (in terms of surplus labour and the wage as reproduction of labour-power). As long as the combat remains that of the wage-labourer or even the struggle for the liberation of labour, it will contain within it, within waged labour, the appropriation of women. The class struggle will only lead “by its very character” to the abolition of the proletariat in the abolition of capital through the revolutionary confrontation with the female struggle in its specificity. The nature of this specificity of the contradiction between men and women is the supersession of programmatism. If we were to look back at the specifically female struggles and strikes and at the specific characteristics of the activity of women in revolutionary struggles since the French Revolution or even the English Revolution, we would be surprised to discover, in acts, the contradictions and impasses of programmatism – up to and including the appearance of modern feminism in the 60s/70s. A meticulous study of revolutionary movements would certainly reveal that the activity of women in these movements is fully implicated in the impossibility of programmatism in its own terms, in its contradictions and its overcoming.

SOME STRIKES AND REVOLUTIONS

Apart from the participation of women in the combat, which was rarer than a certain legend born precisely of the shocking character of

this presence gives reason to believe, the Commune of 1871 confined women to their traditional social role (as canteen-workers, ambulance-drivers, employees in kilns and hospitals). It would be interesting to see if it is possible to contrast this situation with their role in the first days of the commune.

At the turn of the century, Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget, revolutionary syndicalists, wrote *Comment nous avons fait la Révolution* (“How we made the revolution”), published in error under the title *Comment nous ferons la Révolution* (“How we will make the revolution”) [Ed. Tallandier, no date], which presents itself as a description of communist society. In the guise of a conclusion, the first chapter has as its title “La libération de la femme” (“The liberation of women”). The “liberation of women” is the industrialisation of household tasks as if these were devolved to her by nature, as for the rest... In a society founded on the emancipation of labour, its redistribution and rational reorganisation, “women” are excluded: “In the new organisation, it was judged useless to prescribe for women – as had been done for men – the moral obligation to establish a determinate labour-time. It was considered that her high function of possible maternity liberated her from all other social duties. (op. cit., p. 292).

From the revolutionary syndicalist Pouget to Lenin the Bolshevik, the “liberation of women” is the rationalisation of productive labour by the female collectivisation of domestic tasks. At no moment are men concerned by or implicated in a redistribution of roles. The question of the gender distinction is not attacked at its base, and no revolutionary programme can achieve this.

It is Engels who laid down the theoretical bases for the way in which the question of the gender distinction is posed within the framework of programmatism: the disaggregation of the bourgeois family with the disappearance of its economic base; the renewal of the family after the revolution. An extract from *The Origin of the Family, Private Property*

and the State summarises the matter. After having explained that in the bourgeois class, the concern for inheritance and match-making regulates marriage, Engels continues:

Sex-love in the relationship with a woman becomes, and can only become, the real rule among the oppressed classes, which means today among the proletariat-whether this relation is officially sanctioned or not. But here all the foundations of typical monogamy are cleared away. Here there is no property, for the preservation and inheritance of which monogamy and male supremacy were established; hence there is no incentive to make this male supremacy effective. [...] And now that large-scale industry has taken the wife out of the home onto the labor market and into the factory, and made her often the bread-winner of the family, no basis for any kind of male supremacy is left in the proletarian household – except, perhaps, for something of the brutality towards women that has spread since the introduction of monogamy. [...] Not until the coming of modern large-scale industry was the road to social production opened to her again – and then only to the proletarian wife. But it was opened in such a manner that, if she carries out her duties in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from public production and unable to earn; and if she wants to take part in public production and earn independently, she cannot carry out family duties. (Engels, *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, II. The Family, 4. The Monogamous Family)

Women in the private sphere, men in the social sphere, the naturally female character of domestic tasks (“duties”): all this is presupposed in Engels’ problematic. The revolution is getting women into productive labour and the socialisation of domestic tasks in order to allow them this massive entry into productive labour. What Engels had before his eyes however didn’t influence his analysis in the slightest: proletarian women entered into the factory and had in addition to “carry out their family duties”, but, what’s more, it did not escape Marx or Engels that

this entry into productive labour not only often provoked hostility from men, but it was also far from realising “equality” and in fact produced new differences (under-qualified jobs, wage differentials, more repetitive work...), so much so that not only did the factory fail to alleviate domestic submission, but the factory and domestic submission actually reproduced and legitimised each other. Engels could write some pretty and resounding statements about “domestic slavery” and on women being “the proletarian class”, but by only linking the subservience of women to monogamy, and monogamy to inheritance, proletarian households were supposed to escape this situation. It is noticeable that even the facts that Engels or Marx are able to describe and analyse when it is a question of the economy or of describing a social reality pass beneath their theoretical radar when it is a question of the definition of and the relation between the sexes. It is “the social revolution” as it is for them and their epoch which produces this blindness.

The entire post-revolutionary evolution is, then, no more than a question of morals and mentalities, a terrain which Engels purposefully refuses to broach. It is here that, in the Russian Revolution, Kollantaï perceives that there is a problem that she only broaches from this angle of moral customs [mœurs] and mentalities. She can see, from experience, that this problematic of Engels (taken up by Bebel), does not lead, in the social revolution, to the emancipation of women, but it is on the very basis of the limit of this perspective that she seeks to surpass it. With the suppression of the economic base, which is considered to be monogamy in the framework of private property, the subsequent development is supposedly a question of moral customs [mœurs] and mentalities; this was the only way left open by the problematic itself in order to comprehend its own inadequacy when this became evident, both theoretically and practically, in the aftermath of the revolution.

In Spain, in the very process of the civil war and with the constitution of the anarcho-syndicalist group *Mujeres Libres*, things become more complicated. The first group of *Mujeres Libres* is formed in 1934. Though the founders believed that the civil war would put an end to their activities, it was at this very moment that the movement undergoes a real popular extension and exceeds the group of intellectuals who had founded it: they recognised that “the war has broken the walls of the age-old household”. There is a fundamental point here: if the contradiction contained in the relation between men and women has no resolution in the class struggle, it is however the latter which can put it on the table in a massive way. Even if the contradictions are not to be confused, their order and their dependence are determined by the relations at the heart of capitalist society.

Throughout their existence, the *Mujeres Libres* groups were subject to condescension if not hostility from the other components of the *Movimiento Libertario* (ML – Libertarian Movement). The latter, in October 1938, refused the movement membership of the ML for the following reason: “A female organisation would be an element of disunion and inequality for the movement and this would have negative consequences for the development of the interests of the working class”. However, if it’s not by its simple presence in the public sphere (therein lies the dynamic), *Mujeres Libres* only very marginally brings into question the social roles constituting the gender distinction. The declarations against the subservience of the household are very clear, but this is with the aim of putting the completion of tasks corresponding to the domestic household “at the service of the collectivity rather than of one single individual”. At issue is the furthering of “maternalising aptitudes” and “feminine values”: care for refugees, the injured, orphans, the creation of schools and clinics... “Women, as companions [*compañeras*] of men, as mothers, but also in developing their own personality, must influence the blossoming of the human being” (*Mujeres Libres*, December 1938). When the anarchist

Emma Goldman sent a message of support to the movement, she wrote: “the female sex is the more important because it perpetuates the species”.

At issue here is the creation in the struggle of the social and cultural conditions for the supersession of “patriarchy”; the female struggle is destined to introduce “solidarity”, as feminine value, into the revolution as “social cement of the struggle”.

We can criticise all the limits of *Mujeres Libres*, and certain critiques were expounded at the time, however this revindication of “solidarity”, “feminine value”, as “social cement of the struggle” is inscribed, for *Mujeres Libres*, within a critique of the “linear revolution”. That is to say a critique of a revolutionary process separating its goal from the very modalities of its pursuit and realisation. In short, from its means. In this way a movement like *Mujeres Libres* destabilises programmatism from within, it manifests its internal contradictions and its impossibility in its own terms. *Mujeres Libres*, as we have seen, do not radically question gender distinction or sexual roles. If the revolution is the emancipation of labour, it preserves the proclamation of the population as the principal force of production (cf. Goldman and Kollontai). The production of this force has itself to be emancipated, rationalised, liberated, without being placed into question in its own right, which however cannot be avoided as a result of the content of this “emancipation”, and this “rationalisation”: the public appearance of women.

It was over questions of sex that the sending-back of women from the front and the re-establishing of the gender distinction, which had been overturned momentarily by its simple public appearance, was “immediately” accepted at the beginning of 1937. The liberation of labour signifies that the production of workers becomes the foundational act consciously recognised by society (cf. Emma Goldman). This means men, and women, who, as such, existing as women, are to be controlled by feelings, love, conjugality, they are to be preserved, as women, in the

service of liberated labour. The refusal of the liberation of sexual relations in the revolution is not a question of morals and prejudices: sex produces (free) workers. It is, at root, an arse of a problem, a problem to do with rumpy-pumpy [un problème de cul].

We can pursue the adventures of women, men and the class struggle with the question of female strikes.

A workers' strike is a strike. A female workers' strike is a strike by women. The sexed character of the strike is undeniable, as much as a result of the way in which the female workers themselves pursue and comprehend their strike, as of the attitude of their adversaries: bosses, management, and sometimes male workers and unions. More often than not, the course of these strikes confirms and reproduces the female condition and the gender distinction much more than initiating any questioning of these. The condition of female spouse and mother of workers does not stop at the factory gate, even when there is a strike, as we saw recently with the hypermarkets' strike.

Xavier Vigna dedicates an important chapter to female strikes in *L'Insubordination ouvrière dans les années 68, Essai d'histoire politique des usines* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes).

If all strikes break with the order of the factory and mark a transgression in this way, female strikes compound the offence. They clash with the order of the factory and the sexual division of roles which assign to women submission and the status of being dominated. These strikes set in train a multiple opposition with certain men. First of all, the management of an enterprise is always made up of male faces which crystallise the animosity of the strikers. [...] What's more, in textiles and the clothing industry in particular, the female striking workers often take action without and often against the male workers, cutters or machine operatives, who benefit from a higher status and thus higher wages. In the strikes of PIL in Cerizay, CIP in Haisnes, SCALPEN in Quimper in the Summer of

1976, only one man joined the female workers; again in Cerizay, it was men who violently ejected the strikers who had come to negotiate from the premises of the enterprise. In this way these female strikes kindle a male/female opposition, which often intersects with the opposition between skilled and semi-skilled workers within the group of workers in a particular enterprise. (op. cit., pp. 117–118)

Since the 19th Century, female strikes have engendered a discourse which questions the sexuality of the strikers and hurls opprobrium onto the latter. The transgression which the strike effects is, in this discourse, the proof of a deplorable morality, a dissolute sexuality.

Contrary to any commonplaces about the universality of the class struggle, the struggle of the female workers does not make their situation as women disappear, far from it. It is even possible to think that the subordination of the female condition is reinforced in and by their condition as female workers. It is “as female workers” that women will abolish their condition, but only against their condition as female workers.

2) FEMALE LABOUR IN RESTRUCTURED CAPITAL

The inexorable rise in female labour followed, apparently paradoxically, the crisis at the end of the ‘60s and the restructuring which resulted from it. The development of female labour comes in the wake of the destruction of workers’ identity, the development of precarity and flexibility, whose first victims are female workers. Part-time work is above all a thing to do with female labour. We can’t speak of the increase in female labour without immediately considering its qualitative content in the restructured mode of production in the wake of the crisis. To speak of it in a simply absolute, quantitative way is to miss its meaning. In the restructured capitalist mode of production, the rise of female labour contributes to the porosity between unemployment and employment and to the division of the global mass of necessary labour between more people.

Women exist. They exist in the moment when the porosity between employment, precarity and unemployment becomes dominant and when the action of the proletariat can overthrow the order of the reciprocal definition between unemployment and employment with all the consequences that this can have for the revolutionary course of the class struggle. Up to the current period, they were either excluded from the institutional framework of the definition of waged employment and unemployment according to the sectors and modes of activity that were accorded to them in the social division of labour, or the traditional mode of regulation of female unemployment was still operational, or they were subordinated to the job of their spouse and their unemployment disappeared.

With the crisis female employment has not functioned as “reserve army”, on the contrary, it has increased rather than receding. Female labour accounts even in its specific characteristics for the general hue of the new modalities of employment which are established with the crisis and the restructuring. In any case, it is the very notion of reserve army which has become obsolete in these new modalities of the exploitation of living labour by capital.

What can be observed in an equally pronounced way is the tenacity of the mechanisms of discrimination, of the sexual division of labour, and also the appearance of new forms of inequality. If the crisis in employment has not expelled women from employment like in other periods, if it has not sent them back to the household, it has accentuated their vulnerability to the vicissitudes of the labour-market. So much so, that we can see differences being recreated, not merely perpetuated between men and women which completely go against the current of the irresistible rise in female activity. The feminisation of the labour-market has not been accompanied by gender diversity in the world of work. Feminised professions have continued to be feminised, male occupations have remained “male professions”, impregnable bastions. [...] The concentration of women in

a very small number of sectors of activity remains one of the dominant characteristics of the structure of employment. (Margaret Maruani, *Emploi des femmes: un tableau contrasté*, in *AC: Données et arguments*, t.2, p. 106, Ed Syllepse)

And if these differences between men and women, far from going against the current of the “irresistible rise in female activity”, were in fact the principal reason for it? To ask the question is to answer it. Female labour epitomises the new modalities of employment to the very extent that it is these new modalities which make women remain in the labour-market and carry an increasing weight within it. Part-time work has become the modern shape of the sexual division of the labour-market. In France, women represent around 85 % of people working part-time.

It’s not surprising, then, that although they represent 45% of the active population, women still seem invisible. From major conferences on employment to the different negotiations of collective interprofessional agreements, one can look in vain for the slightest particular mention of women, if its not in relation to measures providing an incentive to part-time working, and even here they are not explicitly mentioned. This “forgetting” is ultimately the recognition of the generality of their “particular” position. In 1998, it was the historic overthrow of the reciprocal definition between unemployment and waged employment which was given its strategic importance in the class struggle by their massive presence in the struggle of the unemployed and the precarious.

We might say, parodying Marx in the 1844 Manuscripts: in this presence of women in the proletariat appears tangibly, reduced to a concrete fact, the degree to which its struggle as a class has become its own calling into question, or the extent to which its calling itself into question has become its existence as class. The degree to which the proletariat has become something contingent for itself, and grasps itself as such, is determined by the character of this presence; the relation of the situation of women

to exploitation as the definition of the proletariat is the most “natural” relation of the proletariat to its own negation.

We have said that with the capitalist mode of production the contradiction “has appeared” (i.e. that of the population as principal productive force). This mode of production is gestating a class struggle which, in abolishing capital, will inescapably pose the question, for everybody, of “conditions inherent to their individuality”, a question which is determined by this contradiction which has appeared, and which is to be superseded. It is, perhaps, in the situation of female labour in restructured capital that the contradiction appears. Female labour is expressive of the general situation as female labour, i.e. all the contradictions of capitalist exploitation in its relation to labour through the specific domination of women resulting from the very relation of capital to labour (always necessary; always too much). It is, then, on the basis of the class struggle, at the level of exploitation, that the men-women relation can be superseded, because this relation contains the class struggle, and because all contradictions have been brought together in the way in which it contains the class struggle.

3) “HUMANITY DOESN'T POSE ITSELF PROBLEMS THAT IT CAN RESOLVE”, BUT TO POSE A QUESTION IS NOT TO RESOLVE IT.

The situation and the struggle of women against male domination objectively possesses a specific content and basis, it is simultaneously within and in relation with the contradiction between proletariat and capital (but never to be confused with it!). This basis is that of the struggle against their appropriation by all men which is constitutive of exploitation and without which the struggle against exploitation cannot go beyond the affirmation and the liberation of labour; the principal force of production would finally be recognised as such. This is a struggle which is not only specific but also definitive as soon as the perspective of the abolition of

capital is that of the abolition of all classes, which itself only becomes the case with this specific struggle. In the specific struggle against male domination, it is the supersession of programmatism which exists or is at least at play. It is no mere coincidence that “second-wave feminism” appears at the end of the ‘60s and develops at the beginning of the ‘70s in relation to the limits of the failure of ‘68.

To say that there can be no revolution as communisation without the abolition of men and women doesn’t mean to say that because the revolution can no longer be anything other than communisation the question will be resolved as a result. This means that the revolution as communisation can end in failure. The revolution as communisation is the social process which allows us to arrive at the situation where the distinction between sexes no longer has any social pertinence, but we must not confuse the construction of the question in the revolution as communisation with the necessity of its resolution.

It is a totally sclerotic vision of the extension and deepening of a struggle to consider that the self-constitution of a group of women is necessarily identitarian and a limit of this struggle. This group does not invent the problem which constitutes it as a particular group vis-à-vis the general problem of the struggle, it is born of the question that the difference between the “sexes” has caused to appear in the course of the struggle. It is often good that the contradiction appears. Those who accuse this type of action of breaching the universalism of the proletariat forget that if this type of actions exists, it is precisely to combat the “essentialising” and/or hostile vision which can be developed in the very course of the struggle (cf. the piquetero movement and the long history of programmatism). Only a theory in which the revolution is the abolition of all classes can look address these problems head-on and not treat them as circumstantial or accidental impediments, just something to be gone beyond as quickly as possible.

We cannot act as if differences and segmentations didn't exist and weren't objective vis-à-vis the superior entity: the common situation of the exploited. Unity will not be achieved for the proletariat except in its abolition, which will not come to pass without internal conflicts which are given by its reproduction which is always implied by the reproduction of capital until its abolition. This will be a question in which revolution and counter-revolution are embroiled.

The domination of women occurs not only in the family but it also spans the whole of production and the reproduction of capitalism. Men draw all sorts of material benefits from this (in terms of lifestyles, the segmentation of the labour-market) which are internal to and defining of the existence as wage-labourers. As long as on a world-scale the working class (men and women) struggles for the defence of its condition or even for its emancipation (programmatism), the question of male domination is only posed marginally, at best in terms of the female revindication of equality which as such is doomed to fail; actions to this end only participate in the impossibility, in its own terms, of the programmatic revolution and of the emancipation of labour. We could consider female activity in revolutions as the marker of their failure.

The revolution as communisation puts the problem of the gender distinction as inherent to exploitation on the table in a practical way. However, even if male domination and capitalist exploitation are socially constructed in a coextensive manner (given by the nature of surplus labour and the wage relation), even if the abolition of one cannot occur without the abolition of the other, the contradictions which produce their supersession are not identical. The struggle of women against male domination is not dissolved within the struggle of the proletariat against capitalist exploitation. If we can say that the contradiction between proletariat and capital, in its revolutionary becoming as communisation, will put the gender distinction (which is necessarily a hierarchical one)

on the table, it does not bear within it, as such, the supersession of this question on which its success is however predicated. The constitution of the group women as second humanity, as “second sex” is irreducible a priori to the contradiction between capital and proletariat. This latter carries within itself the supersession of all classes, the abolition of property, the division of labour, of exchange and of value, of work, of the economy i.e. the production of relations between individuals defining them in their singularity, but it does contain the means for the realisation of that which it carries within itself.

The appropriation of women, i.e. the contradiction which constructs and opposes men and women is inscribed within the very existence of surplus-labour, but the social groups which this appropriation constructs contradictorily are not identical to the classes (proletarians and bourgeois) which the contradiction founded on surplus-labour (i.e. exploitation) opposes. The question is singular, the abolition of surplus-labour, but the protagonists of its resolution are related to each other by different contradictions. The gendered distinction of humanity is implied, included in the contradiction between the proletariat and capital, but the latter, strictly as a contradiction between classes, does not carry within it the supersession of this distinction. This distinction defines a dominated “group”, women, whose domination is essential for exploitation but which is not a class in its own right and whose own object of struggle is male domination and the sexual partition of society. The fact that the constitution of this group is essentially linked to all the contradictions between classes means that its entry on to the stage of history is always linked to revolutionary periods, and that all women do not participate in the struggle of this group simply because they are women. The “bourgeois” woman might participate as a woman in the feminist struggle as long as the latter remains within the problematic of equality or differentialism, but in the female struggle itself a cleavage must appear if what is in question is

the abolition of the gendered division of humanity itself, which is intrinsic to surplus-labour. The end of surplus-labour is the end of the gendered division of humanity and it will be this end only as end of this division.

The increase in the population as principal productive force, the foundation of all forms of surplus-labour, defines, in a class society, an antagonistic partition of society whose elements are not immediately those which are opposed in the extraction of this surplus-labour. It is in this regard that the contradiction which is exploitation necessarily puts the gender distinction on the table, but does not carry immediately within itself the means and the social forces to realise its abolition as communisation. Whichever way you look at it, communisation will be a revolution within a revolution.

See also the two appendices: Gender-Class-Dynamics and Comrades, but Women.

Gender-class-dynamic

It's immediately apparent that all societies hinge on a twofold distinction: between genders and between classes.

That this pairing of distinctions organizes all such societies is not fortuitous: the concept of surplus labor unifies (links) the twofold distinction. In all modes of production up to now, labor, that is, population increase, is the principal productive force (and will remain so for as long as something can be called a productive force). Gender and class distinctions are assumed in the concept of surplus labor (all this was developed in the first chapter of our text [see Gender distinction, programatism and communisation]).

The capitalist mode of production is the first mode of production to have a problem with labor and the growth of the population. Other modes of production had problems with population growth, but they were episodic problems of regulation and not the specific question of a dynamic. No mode of production prior to capitalism had a dynamic of creating the labor that's necessary for its abolition. The gender distinction in these previous modes of production may be (extremely) unsatisfactory, but it is not a contradiction because it defines for every individual the inherent conditions of their individuality.

For surplus labor to become the locus of a double contradiction, it is necessary, certainly, to have the distinction between worker and non-worker as a contradiction (something found in all modes of production), but it is also necessary for there to be a contradictory dynamic between surplus and necessary labor, which is only brought in by the capitalist mode of production.

This contradictory dynamic, which is the contradiction of the capitalist mode of production, changes the distinction of genders from something inherent in the individual into something with a contingent and problematic

status. The contradiction appeared at the very core of the distinction (concerning the ‘inherent condition of individuality’ and a ‘contradiction which appeared’, cf. *The German Ideology*). This contradiction contains within itself both the condition and the modalities of its expression (its discourse, its practice): the contingency of social definitions for every individual, their abstraction, their universality/singularity. A contingency of the definition of class, a contingency of the definition of gender. There are no longer any objective individuals (cf. *Formen...*). Crucially, however, the contingency itself is not contingent but structural, definitive of the definition of individuals; it is necessary. This contingency does not refer back to an individual, to a person who might or might not belong to a class or a gender. The contingency itself cannot not be.

These contingencies of gender distinction and class definition have an identical *raison d'être* (“*raison d'être*” is not synonymous with “content”: the *raison d'être* in Hegel is the ground [fondement]; that is, the reflexivity of the essence of a particular [particulier] in its other; this other is its *raison d'être* insofar as the singularity is defined by the difference between it and its relational other: so this other is its *raison d'être*).

This identical *raison d'être* (of the gender distinction and the class distinction) is the contradiction of surplus and necessary labor which establishes (mediates the one through the other) the contingency of the gender definition and the class definition alike (labor as principal productive force; increase of the population). At this level we cannot yet say that the contingency of the class relation is the dynamic of the gender relation. In fact, on this point, the two are so indissociable that to use one for defining the other is impossible without being tautological. It's a matter of teasing them apart.

Surplus labor is the substance and the concept of both distinctions; the contradiction between surplus and necessary labor is the concept of their contingency. It is the setting in motion of this contradiction which, in the

capitalist mode of production (the only mode of production where this contradiction exists), dissociates the double distinction of class and gender. This contradiction (surplus/necessary labor) is a moving contradiction, it contains within itself, as contradiction, the necessity and the capability of its own reproduction.

Wage labor is the mediation between the pure subjectivity of labor (the non-objectivity of the worker in the capitalist mode of production; the situation of no reserves) and the condition and means of labor as objectivity. Wage labor is the abolition of the separation within the separation, the abolition of the contingency within the contingency. But the movement has an essential condition: the existence and reproduction of gender differences, and in two senses.

First of all, by definition wage labor includes the creation, differentiation, and hierarchy of public and private spheres, of production and reproduction. The reproduction of labor power is the private matter of the workers. Impervious to its productive aspect, it includes the reproduction of the corps of workers, the control [arraisonnement] of women and their privatization (women as private property/women relegated to the private sphere). Wage labor presupposes reproduction as a private matter for the race of workers and the singular appropriation of women – that is, each male gets his own. This appropriation defines them within the private sphere. By defining gender under the concept of surplus labor with the population as the main productive force, the female gender is consigned to reproduction. From this point of view the corps of wage-earners is masculine (we will need to return to the significance of women's participation in wage labor from the beginning of capitalism).

Secondly, the movement of the contradiction between surplus and necessary labor, as a contradiction in process, entails the suppression of the contingency of gender differentiation. In the moving contradiction, this contingency exists in order not to exist: work as exploitable matter

creates a distinction of genders, and as such is the concealed basis of the contradiction between surplus and necessary labor. It's the relative value of the relation between surplus and necessary labor which is at stake (one more or one less) and not the absolute value (no plus or minus sign) of this relation: work as productive force and exploitable matter. Hence this movement presupposes the naturalization of the gender distinction. From this viewpoint, the contradiction in process has the distinction of genders as a precondition.

It follows from the setting in motion of the contradiction and from these two points that the distinction of classes and the class struggle do not of themselves give rise to the gender distinction as a contingent phenomenon (as a contradictory appearance, that is, an unfortunate or unhappy individuality).

Not only is this movement predicated on the existence of the gender distinction, but also on its naturalization, the disappearance of its contingency (in the West, it was in the 16th century that the gender relation came to be naturalized as an individual essence instead of a set of behaviors. The objective individual does not need to be naturalized; he is always already defined. What characterizes him and distinguishes him is not an essence but his behaviors. Naturalization, for its part, is the complement of abstraction and universality).

The gender relation is a contradiction between men and women. As such, this contradiction is in the class struggle against the class struggle. In a society of classes, the gender distinction is constantly obscured as a social phenomenon; it is the presupposition that class society naturalizes. The contradiction between men and women ensures its existence in the class struggle against itself, more precisely against their conflictual reproduction. The proletarian (man) who struggles as such against capital reproduces in his proletarian struggle the gender distinction and the contradiction between men and women.

If it can be said that the dynamic of the gender distinction is the contingency of the class relation, this is only insofar as it is directly what it is: a contradiction between men and women only where the contingency of class affiliation exists.

The hierarchical and contradictory gender distinction is the contingency of class affiliation; the latter does not exist elsewhere (an equality is always reversible, but always has a way of declaring itself where it is most expressive). The contingency of class affiliation that exists in the contradiction between surplus and necessary labor is rooted in the very fact that labor is the main productive force. With the gender distinction, it is labor as productive force and exploitable material that is at stake in the contradiction – that is, to put it bluntly, the appropriation of women by all men (wage-earners and capitalists).

At issue is the very relation which is included as such, as labor, between surplus and necessary labor and not the movement of this contradiction as a contradiction in process. What counts is not the position of the cursor but the object to which the cursor is applied and without which the cursor would not exist.

In the course of history, the contradiction between men and women receives its admission ticket from the class struggle: the English Revolution, 1789, 1830, 1848, turn-of-the-century

anarchism, the period after 1968 (according to Joan Scott [Only Paradoxes to Offer], the history of feminism seems like an illusion). A certain pressure is needed in the class struggle (the term “pressure” is vague and is used here only evocatively – the criteria would have to be defined) for the naturalization of the gender distinction that the class struggle presupposes no longer to be taken for granted (this “no longer taken for granted” is a criterion of the pressure). But then, in that event, the specific dynamic of the gender distinction appears to buck the course

of the class struggle, as “radical” and “violent” as it may be. And the matter does not end there.

The class struggle is a game that would always have the same winner were it not for the fact that it brings about the abolition of its own rules (cf. TC 20 and the summary: “De la contradiction entre le prolétariat et le capital à la production du communisme”): exploitation is a contradiction for itself. “It is the object as a totality, the capitalist mode of production, which is in contradiction with itself in the contradiction of its elements because the contradiction with the other is for each element a self-contradiction, in that the other is its other.”

But the content and resolution of this self-contradiction as a contradiction between classes is the troubling emergence of the gender distinction and of the contradiction between men and women. The contradiction arrives at the heart of the class struggle, as an imposing and, above all, specific presence.

Paola Tabet (*L'Arraînement des femmes*) shows that “reproduction is the ground on which the social relations of sex are based.” It is the ground, the substance and the dynamic of the contradiction between men and women which can develop as such, for itself, along with the capitalist mode of production. Its dynamic, in the sphere of reproduction, is labor in the capitalist mode of production (always necessary, always excessive). The contradiction between men and women cannot be folded into the class struggle, but the conjunction of the two is not fortuitous, either theoretically or as a set of historical events.

In its contradiction with capital, the proletariat is in contradiction with itself and this self-contradiction can even be manifested in its struggles, in its action as a class, that is, as a lag [*écart*] within the limit (acting as a class). But in the course of the class struggles, the contradiction between men and women is what enables the boundary to be crossed, because its specific ground is reproduction (along with everything that this ground

comprises: essentially the separation between public and private, which is necessarily challenged) so that it's no longer simply a question of struggle between classes but of their very existence when what appears is labor itself as productive force, and the appearance of labor as productive force establishes the contingency of class designation.

Popular revolutions (the English Revolution, the French Revolution, the dual-tendency revolutions [Marx: the New Rhenish Gazette; Trotsky: Permanent Revolution; Guérin: *Les Luittes de classes sous la Première République*] or workers' revolutions have always marked a return to limits by putting women back "in their place".

This conjunction is not fortuitous for the reasons we have given, but neither is it necessary, for the same reasons. The contradiction between men and women needs to assert itself in and especially against the class struggle (the reflexive game of struggling classes). The proletariat must find a way, in its struggle as a class (limit), against capital, to call itself back into question, in order for this contradiction between men and women to affect it. Which is to say, in order for the conjunction to be meaningful for both contradictions in question.

That is what struggles must be about.

Yet a struggle of women, even with ordinary demands which are themselves not particularly "feminine" (wages, working conditions, layoffs...) is never just a struggle or a strike, but always a struggle or a strike by women. In fact, the contradiction between men and women is never absent, whether it is addressed as such or just present in the themes. All women's movements bring to the table (or just make apparent) the question of the separation of the private and public spheres (to challenge their separation is to challenge their very existence, which is nothing if not separate) constituting the wage relation; the question of subsistence, of solidarity and of unproductive-reproductive labor, that is to say, the organization of life despite exchange; the question of sexuality (an

ostensible public appearance is always attached to a deviant sexuality); and finally the pleasure of being together not only as female workers or employees, but as women.

Even the participation of wives, companions, mothers, sisters, etc. in (male) workers' struggles radically changes the content and the scope of these struggles (the long English miners strike is not understandable without this factor).

In their own struggles or in that of male workers, when women intervene, even in the direct expression of ordinary demands, a different dimension, something other than the reflexive game between the classes, always appears.

Comrades, but women

Revolution as abolition of class and gender raises certain questions and problems pertaining to the link between class struggle and the struggle of women. One of the problems posed for us is that the departure point for this text, which is situated within an ongoing project that has seen revisions and advances, is the necessity of gender abolition in revolution understood as communisation. Thus one is led to explore the question of the articulation between class struggles and the women's struggles, between capitalist exploitation and masculine domination, between feminism and programmatism...

Hence the departure point for this text is not situated in current struggles or in the structure of the relation as it is manifest therein.

Now, if one submits that the abolition of genders will be a revolution in the revolution, this presupposes a particular dynamic that is not subsumed by that of the class struggle even when the latter turns against itself. Moreover, if one speaks of the particular dynamic in the course of the revolution, already there is today particular dynamic of the gender relation which is not reduced to the class relation. To say particular dynamic is to say specific contradiction, for a simple relation of antagonism doesn't contain any dynamic. Thus it is about the possibility of thinking a revolution in the revolution, a contradiction in the contradiction. But it is problematic to include one element only within another element. The traps and the difficulties are legion. We can see this in the recent history of the relations between feminism and programmatism. Indeed, in the programmatic context, there are roughly two possibilities for women who confront this question in struggle or in theory:

If the women posit their exploitation as an articulation of the class struggle, the gender relation disappears in both practice and theory. In other words, the category "woman" is absorbed and rendered invisible

by the class struggle. This approach has the pretense of addressing the question, but it does so only in order to make it disappear (this is one of the dead-ends of the “class struggle” tendency within feminism).

If women who pose this question are forced, in order to avoid the first solution we have just described, to posit the existence of a specific mode of exploitation independent of the capitalist relation of exploitation, they do so in order to enable advances within the specific categories and processes of the gender relation. This is the contribution of the “revolutionary Feminists” who built the concept of domestic labor and who speak of the abolition of men and women. This contribution is the basis on which we were able to undertake this work. However, and despite what is at stake, we are aware that it is difficult and artificial to maintain a segregation, to think the category woman and the category proletariat as independent, for in real life one is of course simultaneously both.

If the question of the dynamic is posed, it is because in certain present struggles where women pose the question of the gender relation we already see that they must then confront their male comrades during the struggle, as for example in the piquetero movement in Argentina. In August 2005 the *Movimiento de mujeres desocupadas* (MMD) from Tartagal was created, and these women wanted to struggle “alone” because “even if they were the majority in the piquetero organizations, they were not the majority in the ruling bodies of these organizations” (Bruno Astarian, “Le mouvement des piqueteros – Argentine 1994–2006,” *Échanges* pamphlet). Bruno Astarian adds “And when the gains of the movement were divided up, the women were probably wronged.” However, he concludes:

“For the time being, this is all we know about the MMD of Tartagal. But one doesn’t need to know more in order to understand that its creation marks a recoil in the general movement. The separation of the struggle of the unemployed women from that of the unemployed men, as any separation grounded on race, age, nationality, etc., goes against the

abolition of the categories of the capitalist society, categories that we have seen undermined in more intense phases of struggle.” (ibid.)

We don’t know what kind of role or place the groups of women could obtain at the heart of these struggles, but a critique which views their appearance to be a simple sign of recoil and of the division of the movement, just like “nationality” would be understood, is nothing but an echo of the classical programmatic idea.

We deduce, therefore, that within the gender relation and the situation of women, there is something which objects to the class struggle and which has a very concrete effect: when women fight, whether in the private or public sphere, when they attack the very existence of those spheres which is constituted by their separation into public and private, they must confront their male comrades, insofar as they are men and insofar as they are their comrades. And they (the women) are the men’s comrades, but women.

Finally, once we have taken all this in, the importance of specifying the particular dynamic of the gender relation is that we will then be able to think how and why the future ex-women – who alone pose by their acts the necessity of the abolition of gender, because of their place in the contradictory relation man/woman – will have to confront the future ex-men in the course of the revolution in order to overcome this division.

Response to the Americans on gender

I will answer these four questions in the same order they were asked, but sometimes the answer to the second one is required to understand the first.

1. WHY DO ALL CLASS SOCIETIES DEPEND ON THE INCREASE IN POPULATION AS PRINCIPAL PRODUCTIVE FORCE?

If all societies up to the present depend on the increase in population as principal productive force, it is precisely because they are class societies. In all societies, labor appears as the difference within productive activity between people in their individual aspect and in their social aspect; to this respect labor's social feature acquires an autonomous existence distinct from individuals and from their own activity.

This non-coincidence of individual and social activity in labor is a historical fact in all human societies up to the present. This non-coincidence doesn't need to be produced as theory (only analyzed)—if one wants to avoid explaining why there is history (which always results in a teleology). The non-coincidence means that society must represent itself to itself as something which is exterior to its own scission. The reproduction of this scission includes the constraint of surplus labor as necessary to the material existence of the class who, as non-worker, represents society. The worker, the non-worker, and surplus only exist if they exist together.

Despite the diversity of relations of production and their historical combination in the mode of production, we eliminate the specific forms and the differences between these modes of production in order to keep only what they have in common, an essential common point is the fact that "if we take any social production (...) we can always distinguish

between the part of work in which the product is individually consumed by the producers and their families and another part -- abstraction which is made from the portion entering productive consumption -- which is always of surplus labor, therefore the product serves to satisfy the general needs of society. No matter what the distribution of the surplus product, and whatever person who acts as the representative of these social needs (underlined by me).” (Capital). Capital did not invent surplus labor. Whenever a faction of society has a monopoly of the means of production, the worker, free or not, as “an objective individual” in the case where belonging to a community is the preliminary condition to their activity as a worker or a “contingent individual”⁴⁴ is forced to work beyond the amount of labor needed to reproduce themselves, thereby producing a surplus destined to subsistence for the owners of the means of production. The distinction between necessary labor and surplus labor can even be extended to “classless” societies, which are in fact only societies where classes exist in an element other than the economy.

There cannot be surplus labor without a level of labor productivity that allows the extension of labor time beyond that which is necessary for the producer to obtain their own subsistence, a level of labor productivity that can increase surplus labor without population growth. But this productivity is in no way the cause of surplus value and exploitation. Surplus labor implies, in one form or another, a relationship of exploitation, because it implies a social differentiation between individual and social. Therefore in every mode of production, the increase in population as productive force, as well as the productivity of labor, drive the contradictions which are rooted in the reproduction of the conditions of this exploitation. Surplus labor determines population growth as principal productive force, and so

44 The distinction between “contingent individual” and “objective individual” is reviewed by Marx in *Formes antérieures à la production capitaliste*. This text is often published with *Grundrisse*.

it is a principle productive force in all class societies. This necessity drives the contradictions specific to each mode of production which requires it.

Surplus labor and exploitation are given simultaneously, and “This never happens without help from the force that subjects one to another (laborer and non-laborer, even if it’s the community that appears to be this way)” (ibid, t.2, p.185). If a part of the society can carry out this takeover by force of another part of society, it is because in no social form up until now have social activity and individual activity coincided. Whatever the forms may be of society, of community, of social activity, they have always taken an independent and autonomous form in relation to the individuals of which they are the community. These forms can be blood relation, common ancestry, the totem, religion of the ancestors, the “forces of nature”... There are no obligations or duties without those who are compelled abide by them. This independent social form can even be an assemblage of all the members of the community, which is never merely the sum of its parts.

And everywhere this community appears as men vis-à-vis women.

Already, in the Paleolithic societies, the death rituals revealed marked social hierarchies. On the basis of these hierarchies, during the Neolithic period, the first theocratic states are formed (around the Sumerian temples), formalizing and deepening the relations of force [coup de force] already present in all the previous social forms. During the Copper Age, the inequalities become rigid and turn hereditary, at the moment when exchange becomes organized over vast spaces and when metallurgy, the wheel, the wagon and the tank, the domesticization of the horse, modify qualitatively the productive force of work. To speak clearly: “primitive communism” is a huge joke and the questions posed in terms of origin are always suspect.

Essentially, a given mode of production consists in the reproduction of the coercion which concentrates the appropriation of surplus labor,

or, in other words, in the assemblage of social conditions that determine and reproduce a specific mode of exploitation. In the capitalist epoch, the form of the appropriation of surplus labor is directly economic; at other periods the relations of blood, religion, or the direct sexual division of the community have functioned as relations of production. A mode of production is understood by reconstructing the conditions and the effects of this complex articulation (in which the economic is not always given clearly and plainly, though one is tempted to see it this way when one transposes the capitalist conditions on the previous modes of production) and not by piling superstructures upon infrastructures.

This division of society between workers and non-workers is immediately doubled in another division internal to the first, but escaping its terms: the gendered division of society.

The first condition of this surplus labor is “population control,” the control of the principal productive force (which is the increase of the population), and thus the control of those who are the producers. The autonomization of the social character of activity is in itself the existence of a constraint on surplus labor, and is constructed as a social distinction of anatomical characteristics. From biological reproduction, and from the specific place of women in this reproduction, the result of a social process is presupposed as given. The point of departure (and having a point of departure is one of the necessary flaws of theoretical production) is what makes this place specific as social construction and differentiation : the modes of production up to today. The increase of the population as principal productive force is no more a natural relation than any other relation of production

Indeed, up until capital, including where it becomes contradictory, the principal source of surplus labor is the work of increasing the population. The necessary appropriation of surplus labor, a pure social phenomenon (surplus labor is not tied to the supposed overcapacity of labor) creates

gender and the social pertinence of the gender distinction in a sexual and naturalized way. The possession of a uterus does not signify “baby maker”; to move from one to the other one requires an entire social apparatus of appropriation and a scenario of “making babies”⁴⁵, the apparatus through which women exist. The possession of a uterus is an anatomical feature, and not immediately a distinction, but “baby maker” is a social distinction which makes the anatomical feature a natural distinction. Within the nature of this social construction, of this system of constraint, that which is socially constructed -- women -- are always sent back to biology. Without putting this into operation, to have a uterus is an anatomical feature and not a distinction: the uterus does not make the woman any more than the melanin makes the slave. Just as for capital to appear as a thing is a manifestation of self, belonging to its being, it would not be a relation without appearing as a thing ; just as value of labor power would not be what it is without appearing as the price of labor ; just as the production of the social category of woman would not be what it is without being naturalized and the relation between men and women would not be a social relation without appearing as natural.

Whether one is in the Amazon, in the Islands of Trobriand (Malinowski), in Athens or New York, there is autonomization as a form of the community or class, there is surplus labor and therefore labor, and thus there is the population as principal productive force. And by the same token, there is a gender division, the creation of women⁴⁶ by the social actuation and the appropriation of the biological reproductive capacity and there is appropriation of the biological reproductive capacity of women. Each time, a whole structure of social violence defines them, and they are coerced and

45 The apparatus of violence includes rape, but also love, care, softness, concern for others, being a body.

46 God created Brigitte Bardot, not woman.

conscripted (this can be the prohibition of the usage of certain hunting weapons, private and domestic labor, or part-time work).

2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE INCREASE IN POPULATION TO BE THE MAIN PRODUCTIVE FORCE?

As soon one has said “productive forces,” one has indicated the possibility of counting and listing: population, machines, science, etc. But then, one runs up against the heterogeneity of the elements that are to be added together in our list. One must also add the modalities of the application of science, the technical capacities of a populace (a historic phenomenon), an organization of work, a social organization of production (the factory) and then -- why not! -- The intervention of the state, the power of credit. Counting and addition cannot make concepts match up with categories. If, on the other hand, the productive forces “develop”, then they can be measured. The measure is the productivity of work. The productive forces are grasped only in a synthesis which is not the result of an addition and is not resolved through a census. This synthesis is the productive force of labor.

“Indirectly, however, the development of the productivity of labor contributes to the increase of the value of the existing capital by increasing the mass and variety of use-values in which the same exchange-value is represented and which form the material substance, i.e., the material elements of capital, the material objects making up the constant capital directly, and the variable capital at least indirectly. More products which may be converted into capital, whatever their exchange-value, are created with the same capital and the same labor. These products may serve to absorb additional labor, hence also additional surplus-labor, and therefore create additional capital. The amount of labor which a capital can command does not depend on its value, but on the mass of raw and auxiliary materials, machinery and elements of fixed capital and necessities

of life, all of which it comprises, whatever their value may be. As the mass of the labor employed, and thus of surplus-labor increases, there is also a growth in the value of the reproduced capital and in the surplus-value newly added to it.” (Capital Vol III, New World edition, p 248)

Defined synthetically as the productive force of labor we understand that the productive forces “develop”, and we understand how. Capitalism has not “liberated the development of the forces of production”, it has imposed upon the productive forces a type of development determined by its own rhythm and pace, including with regard to the population. For capital, the increase in the productive force of labor is not universally applied:

“Pour le capital, cette productivité est augmentée non quand on peut réaliser une économie sur le travail vivant en général, mais seulement quand on peut réaliser sur la fraction payée du travail vivant une économie plus importante qu’il n’est ajouté de travail passé... (...) Du reste, c’est seulement dans le mode de production capitaliste que doit s’accroître absolument le nombre de salariés, en dépit de leur diminution relative. Pour lui, des forces de travail sont en excédent dès lors qu’il n’est plus indispensable de les faire travailler de douze à quinze heures par jour. Un développement des forces productives qui réduirait le nombre absolu des ouvriers, c’est-à-dire permettrait en fait à la nation tout entière de mener à bien en un laps de temps moindre sa production totale, amènerait une révolution, parce qu’il mettrait la majorité de la population hors du circuit. Ici encore apparaît la limite spécifique de la production capitaliste... (...) La limite de cette production c’est le temps excédentaire des ouvriers. L’excédent de temps absolu dont bénéficie la société ne l’intéresse nullement. Pour elle, le développement de la force productive n’est important que dans la mesure où il augmente le temps de surtravail de la classe ouvrière et non pas où il diminue le temps de travail nécessaire à la production matérielle en général ; ainsi il se meut dans des contradictions.” (Marx, Le Capital, Ed. Soc., t.6, pp.274-275-276).

The law of population in the capitalist mode of production is governed by the relation between necessary labor and the capacity of capital to transform superfluous time into surplus labor.

The theoretical synthesis of the productive forces is worked out in the productive force of labor and its development in the law of population. The productive forces are a relationship of appropriation (and not of property) between the means of production, the objects of labor and the producers (including here the non-workers as organizers of production). We say a relationship of appropriation and not a relation of production (the factory, for example, is the specific product of capitalism and its relations of production -- cf. real subsumption as specifically capitalist mode of production -- but the factory is not itself the relations of production which constitute capitalism) because if this relation takes place inside the mode of production, and if its form and rate of development are determined by the mode of production, it is not a relation that remains and persists in the relationship of appropriation, but the restoration [rétablissement] of a unity such as the relations of production determine it (the worker is reunited with the object and the means of labor when it ceases to be owned). And we return from there to work and to the population.

Population can be called the principal productive force only insofar as it becomes the productive force of labor (rather than science or the means of production, etc.). It becomes this not as a simple collection of individuals, but insofar as a specific social arrangement has population as its object, and makes population into the productive force of labor, which is the true concept of productive forces.

In the capitalist mode of production, the principal "productive force" is the working class itself. No matter the transformations of the production process which are induced by the passage to real subsumption, it is always living labor which brings the dead labor back to life. It is always the productive force of labor which is the synthesis of all that we enumerate

as productive forces. It's not only a matter of a principal productive force amongst many others, but of their synthesis and of their very existence.

Labor is not a productive force as long as it resides in the subjectivity of the laborer. The working class is this "principal productive force" only insofar as its activity is consistently necessary and always in excess, insofar as its activity is in itself "the contradiction of labor time". The content of the famous contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production is distilled in the contradiction between the capacity for labor to valorize capital, and the fact that this capacity to valorize is called into question by the ongoing process of valorization. Therefore when Marx qualifies the working class as principal productive force, he qualifies it as a revolutionary class. The "principal productive force" "breaks apart" the very narrow relations of production only by abolishing itself, and along with it all the relations of production in which it exists and is reproduced as principal productive force (the abolition of the relation is the abolition of its terms). That is related to the following question.

3. TC OFTEN WRITE THAT "LABOR IS A PROBLEM FOR CAPITAL". DOES THIS MEAN THE FALLING RATE OF PROFIT? OR DOES IT MEAN THE INCREASING SURPLUS POPULATIONS POSE A PROBLEM OF REVOLT? OR BOTH?

The capitalist mode of production is the first mode of production which has a problem with labor and the increase in the population as "principal productive force"⁴⁷. Even in real subsumption of labor under capital, the

⁴⁷ The increase in population as principal productive force drives the contradictions in all modes of production, but the capitalist mode of production is the first whose problem with population and labor is intrinsic to its dynamic and not a rupture in its regeneration : The alternation of the full world and the empty world of the feudal system ; antique colonial expansion ; the different solutions to the

extraction of surplus value, in its relative form which reduces necessary labor time, must be combined with the increase in simultaneous working days. An increase in the rate of exploitation which is not accompanied with a multiplication of working days will cause an immediate and radical decline in the rate of profit.

It is a law of capital, as we saw, to create surplus labour, disposable time; it can do this only by setting necessary labour in motion—i.e. entering into exchange with the worker. It is its tendency, therefore, to create as much labour as possible; just as it is equally its tendency to reduce necessary labour to a minimum. It is therefore equally a tendency of capital to increase the labouring population, as well as constantly to posit a part of it as surplus population—population which is useless until such time as capital can utilize it. (Hence the correctness of the theory of surplus population and surplus capital.) It is equally a tendency of capital to make human labour (relatively) superfluous, so as to drive it, as human labour, towards infinity. Value is nothing but objectified labour, and surplus value (realization of capital) is only the excess above that part of objectified labour which is necessary for the reproduction of labouring capacity. But labour as such is and remains the presupposition, and surplus labour exists only in relation with the necessary, hence only in so far as the latter exists. Capital must therefore constantly posit necessary labour in order to posit surplus labour; it has to multiply it (namely the simultaneous working days) in order to multiply the surplus; but at the same time it must suspend them as necessary, in order to posit them as surplus labour. As regards the single working day, the process is of course simple: (1) to lengthen it up to the limits of natural possibility; (2) to shorten the necessary part of it more and more (i.e. to increase the productive forces without limit). But the working day, regarded spatially—time itself regarded as space—is many

pressure on the milieus of the “primitive communities” ; the frontlines pioneered by the asiatic mode of production.

working days alongside one another. The more working days capital can enter into exchange with at once, during which it exchanges objectified for living labour, the greater its realization at once. It can leap over the natural limit formed by one individual's living, working day, at a given stage in the development of the forces of production (and it does not in itself change anything that this stage is changing) only by positing another working day alongside the first at the same time - by the spatial addition of more simultaneous working days. E.g. I can drive the surplus labour of A no higher than 3 hours; but if I add the days of B, C, D etc., then it becomes 12 hours. In place of a surplus time of 3, I have created one of 12. This is why capital solicits the increase of population; and the very process by means of which necessary labour is reduced makes it possible to put new necessary labour (and hence surplus labour) to work. (I.e. the production of workers becomes cheaper, more workers can be produced in the same time, in proportion as necessary labour time becomes smaller or the time required for the production of living labour capacity becomes relatively smaller. These are identical statements.) (This still without regard to the fact that the increase in population increases the productive force of labour, since it makes possible a greater division and combination of labour etc. The increase of population is a natural force of labour, for which nothing is paid. From this standpoint, we use the term natural force to refer to the social force. All natural forces of social labour are themselves historical products.) It is, on the other side, a tendency of capital—just as in the case of the single working day—to reduce the many simultaneous necessary working days (which, as regards their value, can be taken as one working day) to the minimum, i.e. to posit as many as possible of them as not necessary. Just as in the previous case of the single working day it was a tendency of capital to reduce the necessary working hours, so now the necessary working days are reduced in relation to the total amount of objectified labour time. (If 6 are necessary to produce 12 superfluous

working hours, then capital works towards the reduction of these 6 to 4. Or 6 working days can be regarded as one working day of 72 hours; if necessary labour time is reduced by 24 hours, then two days of necessary labour fall away—i.e. 2 workers.) At the same time, the newly created surplus capital can be realized as such only by being again exchanged for living labour. Hence the tendency of capital simultaneously to increase the labouring population as well as to reduce constantly its necessary part (constantly to posit a part of it as reserve). And the increase of population itself the chief means for reducing the necessary part. At bottom this is only an application of the relation of the single working day. Here already lie, then, all the contradictions which modern population theory expresses as such, but does not grasp. Capital, as the positing of surplus labour, is equally and in the same moment the positing and the not-positing of necessary labour; it exists only in so far as necessary labour both exists and does not exist. (Marx, *Grundrisse*, from marxists.org, p. 400)⁴⁸

48 From this point of view, we cannot agree with certain aspects of the approach of the text “Misery and Debt”. The process of the “temporal contradiction” outlined there is not founded on the development of value. Without taking into consideration the conditions of the absolute increase of the mass of profit, this text treats the “general law of accumulation” through rising organic composition as a physico-technical law. When all is said and done, we do not know what blocks expanded reproduction to the point of not being able to absorb capital and liberated labor. The technical-physical lines of emerging/declining industrial sectors cannot all be understood homogeneously through a unified evolution of organic composition, mass, and rate of profit. The law of population of the capitalist mode of production is governed by the relation between necessary labor and the capacity of capital to transform superfluous time into surplus labor. The text is written as if these discrete processes did not unfold in an economy where they are

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Within an analytical framework in which the gender division is understood as contradiction, if we understand that labor is a problem for capital, it is not merely a way of understanding the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. To say “labor is a problem for capital” also allows us to understand that the working class as the primary productive force simultaneously reproduces the categories of men and women. The categories of men and women are thus absolutely not contingent. However, with the capitalist mode of production, these categories can no longer be taken for granted [*ne vont plus de soi*], because it is the population as primary productive force which, with capital, can no longer be taken for granted [*ne va plus de soi*].

The conditions under which individuals have intercourse with each other, so long as the above-mentioned contradiction is absent, are conditions appertaining to their individuality, in no way external to them; conditions under which these definite individuals, living under definite relationships, can alone produce their material life and what is connected with it, are thus the conditions of their self-activity and are produced by this self-activity. The definite condition under which they produce, thus corresponds, as long as the contradiction has not yet appeared, to the reality of their conditioned nature, their one-sided existence, the one-sidedness of which only becomes evident when the contradiction enters on the scene and thus exists for the later individuals. Then this condition appears as an accidental fetter, and the consciousness that it is a fetter is imputed to the earlier age as well. (Marx, *The German Ideology* (MECW 5), I. Feuerbach, [§ IV], Contradiction between individuals and their conditions of life as contradiction between productive forces and the form of intercourse).

With the capitalist mode of production, the contradiction “appeared”: that of the population as principal productive force. It is impossible to internally defined by the relations of value and profit.

escape from it without the abolition of this mode of production. This mode of production hatches in its chest a class struggle which, in abolishing capital, will not permit any person to escape the question of the “inherent conditions of their individuality.” This is a question determined according to this “apparent contradiction” between being a “man” or a “woman” -- that needs to be overcome. In its own terms and its own dynamic, the emergence as contradiction of gendered reproduction of humanity existed as a particular moment of the contradictory relation of capital and labor at the interior of the capitalist mode of production, that is the moment of capital as moving contradiction:

Le surtravail des grandes masses a cessé d'être la condition du développement de la richesse générale. (...) Le capital est une contradiction en procès : d'une part, il pousse à la réduction du temps de travail à un minimum, et d'autre part il pose le temps de travail comme la seule source et la seule mesure de la richesse (Marx, *Fondements de la critique de l'économie politique*, Ed. Anthropos, p.222).

Even in this, it is the gender division which, in the capitalist mode of production, is a moving contradiction : on the one hand it pushes the indistinct and abstract universality of individuals face to face with the power of society which it represents as autonomous value; and on the other hand, it poses labor and the growth of the population as the sole source of that valorization. It wants women and it doesn't want them. It wants the gender distinction and it wants the universality of the simple individual, abstract and free. It wants the “free woman”, but always woman is her ideal, and the contradiction in which the gender distinction is locked must appear at one and the same time objectively necessary and individually contingent. Also, it wants the family as private space of reproduction of labor power -- and at the same time, to destroy the family.

* * *

As for the “problem of revolt” that is posed by overpopulation, it is important to consider that the question raised by overpopulation does not have its own dynamic, is not a question which can define itself. The question of surplus population is always modeled according to the categories and the determinations of each cycle of struggles. It is thus that the “problem of revolt” is inscribed in labor as a “problem for capital”.

During the crisis of the 1930's, the unemployed became objects of organization and they functioned as a particular social force. The fight against unemployment moves forward by reinforcing the bonds between the unemployed and the employed. It's not a matter of posing unemployment as the social manifestation of the contradiction of waged labor, and posing the struggle of the unemployed as the obsolescence of the activities of the struggle of the waged workers [poser le chômage comme la manifestation sociale des contradictions du travail salarié et la lutte des chômeurs comme caducité en actes, dans la lutte de classe, du travail salarié]. It is nothing but the sign of capitalist anarchy in the market. In France, for example, it enhances the struggle against unemployment through guaranteed unemployment insurance [l'assurance obligatoire] and by the establishment of the 40 hour work week.

During the same period, the struggle of the unemployed in Amsterdam revealed the impossibility of the inverse, that is, organizing the class against capital around unemployment as the obsolescence of the wage relation (this kind of struggle is now possible, because since then the clear separation between work and unemployment has been made more clear, which had only begun to be formalized during the dissolution of the crisis of the 1970s and the restructuring which followed this separation).

“The unemployed of Amsterdam were without a doubt the most radical sector of the proletariat in the Netherlands. Obligated to their daily migration to the unemployment office, the private workers politicized themselves very quickly; the long lines every day were conducive to political

discussion and the dissemination of revolutionary press, in particular those of the council communists, whose propaganda resonated. After 1932, “struggle committees” of unemployed were formed in Amsterdam ; Very combative, they fell to the blow of the CPN (the communist party of the Netherlands) in spite of the propaganda of the GIC (International Communist Group) to “carry out the struggle without any union or political party.”

“Le mouvement des chômeurs déboucha en juillet 1934 sur une véritable insurrection, lorsque le gouvernement conservateur de Colijl décida de réduire les allocations de chômage. Le 4 juillet, les ouvriers du quartier du Jordaan d’Amsterdam manifestèrent spontanément, sans consignes de partis ou de syndicats, contre les mesures gouvernementales. Ils offrirent dans ce quartier, comme dans le “quartier indonésien” une vive résistance aux attaques de la police motorisée ou à cheval. Les rues du quartier du Jordaan furent bientôt couvertes de barricades et aux mains des ouvriers et des chômeurs, qui une fois “victorieux” rentrèrent chez eux. Mais le lendemain l’armée occupait le quartier avec des chars et des mitrailleuses. La répression contre les ouvriers se solda par 7 morts et 200 blessés. Fort de sa “victoire”, le gouvernement néerlandais interdit toute manifestation et tout meeting. Bien qu’ayant pris ses distances avec la lutte des ouvriers du Jordaan - en n’y voyant que pillages et provocations- De Tribune, l’organe du CPN fut interdit. (...) La défaite des chômeurs d’Amsterdam était sévère, car elle signifiait une défaite grave du prolétariat des Pays-Bas, qui était resté passif. En effet, la lutte des chômeurs fut considérée comme une lutte à part, d’une catégorie particulière des ouvriers. Les chômeurs eux-mêmes ne tentèrent pas de généraliser leur mouvement. Le corporatisme et le manque de solidarité entre catégories d’ouvriers, autant de faiblesses : “...Les forces de classe étaient encore si faibles que les ouvriers en lutte ne prêtèrent pas encore pleinement attention à l’extension du mouvement comme leur tâche propre. On était d’avis qu’il

s'agissait seulement d'une lutte des chômeurs devant être menée par eux seuls. Dans le Jordaan et dans ses environs, il y avait différentes usines ; pourtant il n'y eut aucune tentative de la part des chômeurs en lutte de les entraîner dans la lutte." (Räte-Korrespondenz - organe du GIC - n°8-9, 1935)." (Courant Communiste International, "La gauche Hollandaise", p 219-220, Ed du CCI).

When one considers the march of the unemployed of the CGTU (communist) in France, the revolt of Jordan, or the same violent movements in the US, one observes the parallel consolidation of the position of the unemployed and of the waged worker; they are not two separate worlds, rather, there is a separation and a reciprocity. The crux lies within the fact that for the reciprocal definition of unemployed and waged worker, the point of departure, during this period, is the definition of waged work. It is waged work which defines the unemployed. The solution to unemployment is posed in the wage system, in its new modalities put in place by the crisis and social struggles. It is this redefinition of the waged worker in real subsumption which, consequently, defines the unemployed. The unemployed, whose struggles are either direct determinations of this redefinition (action of the CGTU), or they become tragically isolated (Amsterdam and the US). They cannot be the basis of a recomposition of the class which would address the totality of the wage labor relation of capital.

It is not unemployment in itself which determines our understanding of the revolt of the "supernumerary" (there were periods, in the already too-long history of this mode of production, where unemployment was much higher than it is today), but rather, the relation to the aggregate of waged work. In the present cycle of struggles lies the possibility for the class struggle to turn capital, insofar as it is an ongoing contradiction expressed as "tendential fall in the rate of profit" into immediate activities. The mass of unemployed themselves tells us only

that crisis exists -- they say nothing about the particularity of an epoch of the class struggle.

By means of precarity, flexibility, part time work, and all the imaginable forms of unstable employment, capital, having reduced the amount of labor which it required for its reproduction, manages to maintain, as much as possible in the current growth model, an equilibrium between the reduction of necessary labor which increases surplus labor, and the multiplication of simultaneous days, which is to say, the increase of the same necessary labor to increase its surplus. The transformation of the global relation between working class and capital persists through a clear separation between “reserve army” and “active army”. The radical novelty in the struggle of the “supernumerary” is the capacity of the proletariat to deal with their situation, to lay claim to their situation, in the relation of exploitation which establishes capital as ongoing contradiction. This is their capacity to take the offensive against the inessentialization of labor -- the reduction of the amount of labor that capital requires for its reproduction.

“We demand nothing”, one could say.

4. TC SAY THAT WOMEN/THE FAMILY ARE A PROBLEM FOR CAPITAL. IS THIS MERELY BECAUSE LABOR IS A PROBLEM FOR CAPITAL, AND WOMEN/THE FAMILY REPRODUCES LABOR?

Yes, but once this is said, one has articulated an abstract universal.

In the text *Gender Distinction*, programmatism and communisation published in TC 23, we wrote [and have repeated above] (TC 23, p. 111):

“With the capitalist mode of production, the contradiction “appeared”: that of the population as principal productive force. It is impossible to escape from it without the abolition of this mode of production. This mode of production hatches in its chest a class struggle which, in abolishing

capital, will not permit any person to escape the question of the “inherent conditions of their individuality.” This is a question determined according to this “apparent contradiction” between being a “man” or a “woman” -- that needs to be overcome.”

In the course of the discussions which accompanied the drafting and publication of this text, one among us made the following critique:

“The end of this chapter says that the only dynamic is class struggle and class abolition. An attack on the men/women relation is necessary to the abolition of capital, but it is not included with the relation itself. Therefore, this is a little overture, on principle, to say that it is necessary to attack the gender relation specifically, and that will be a struggle within the struggle, because the entire proof relies on a dynamic (the one of the class struggle) that is like an external thing which is included, reintroduced from the outside as the dynamic of the man/woman relation. In this respect, the text takes the relation between men and women as an object and the only content that the text gives to this relation is the wage relation, and so one cannot see why the specific struggle around the gender division is necessary, except because we have the (correct) intuition that this specific attack is necessary. Thus it is necessary for us to say something about the dynamic, or at least say that we lack the dynamic.”

This critique was included in the text *Comrades, but women*, published at the end of the *Gender distinction*...as an element of discussion and critique :

“And yet, if we say that the abolition of gender will be a revolution in the revolution, this assumes a proper dynamic which is something other than the class struggle, which can’t be reduced to the class struggle -- or even to the class struggle in its turning against itself. Moreover, if one speaks of the proper dynamic in the course of the revolution, already there is today a proper dynamic of the gender relation which is not reduced to the class relation. To say proper dynamic is to say specific contradiction,

for a simple relation of antagonism doesn't contain any dynamic. Thus it is about the possibility of thinking a revolution in the revolution, a contradiction in the contradiction. But it is problematic to include one element only within another element. The traps and the difficulties are legion..." (TC 23, p. 126).

The gender division and the relation between men and women was articulated as having the exact same content as the class struggle. The specificity of this relation could only be one accident of the class struggle coming in to "supplement" the class struggle. The fundamental proposition of the text in TC 23 was:

"The appearance as contradiction of the gendered reproduction of humanity is identical to the contradictory relation of capital and labor at the interior of the capitalist mode of production, which is to say, identical to capital as moving contradiction" (we have added an emphasis this time).

* * *

The problem with the assertion of such an identity is that the relation between men and women, the division and the contradiction between the genders, is always regarded as a differentiation of an original sameness. In our text, the distinction between the class struggle and man/woman relations was hidden away in capital as a moving contradiction, which was at once the departure point and the arrival point. This conception merely offers a choice between the "return to self", self-determination of all as a unity (the dialectic of the preservation of the same within the different), and the "bad infinity", which is the reflexivity of an infinite reciprocal action, the mere addition of simultaneous contradictions. This totality (capital as ongoing contradiction) merely announces itself in the diversity of its determinations. We could not consider, without sinking into teleology and universal abstraction, each determination as differentiation of a totality which is always and everywhere self-identical, as particularization of the

universal, as its self-determination. The universal is not immanent to the particular (this would only bring us back to the problematic of the monad), but there is a necessary relation amongst particularities. The immanence of the universal to its parts is not what relates the determinations to each other. The capitalist mode of production as ongoing contradiction is not the universal as immanent to its particular moments (waged labor, capital, ground rent, exploitation, gender distinction).

Nor can one merely reverse the order of existence, from the pre-existence of the totality/identity, to the pre-existence of the determinations/particularities. The particularities do not preceded their identity - if we said so, we would be left only with the ideology of the chance encounter to explain the connection between the class relation and the gender relation.

The unity embodies the necessary co-presence of the two terms (class and gender : exploitation and male dominance) which can only exist together. The totality is the internal requirement each has for the other -- and thus, the totality is also what differentiates each one. Indeed, behind the simple concept of co-presence or involvement/implication [implication], many meanings are possible, including reductive models where the highest achievement is the interaction where x acts upon y which reacts upon x, ad libitum. This system can contain in itself the principle of its overcoming only if one defines the totality as distinct from its particularities, as carrying the relation between its terms (class and gender) to a contradiction for themselves. Totality, capital as ongoing contradiction, is active, it is not the simple co-presence or implication of its terms (class and gender).

A relation of the Whole to its parts, the Whole produced out of the category of "self-determination", we give a Whole which can be recognized not as immanent to its parts, but as the necessary connection between them. The connection between its parts is what makes them belong to the totality.

In connection to the gender distinction we can then formulate the following methodological approach: it is the very dynamic of that particularity which makes it a particularity of the totality. In other words, by its specificity, the gender distinction, male dominance, exists as determination (particularity) of capital as ongoing contradiction.⁴⁹ Capital as ongoing contradiction (the problem with labor) doesn't exist in the form of the relationship between men and women; to the contrary, it's the gender distinction and the contradiction between men and women such as they exist in the capitalist mode of production which create the gender distinction and the contradiction between men and women as determinations of capital as ongoing contradiction.

If women (and as we will soon see, the family) are a problem for capital it isn't only because labor is a problem for capital, but because the activity of women who do not want to remain what they are is a problem. To see only the "problem expressed in a form", we would only have an abstract unity, abstract because self-determination as the form of the gender relation

49 It is difficult but imperative to abandon a behaviourist understanding of the contradiction between men and women, an understanding which is composed of a sum of individual practices and psychology. The contradiction between men and women is not measured in the balance between shared household chores and slaps. "Reproduction is the foundation of the social relation of the sexes" (Paola Tabet : *L'arraisonnement des femmes*). The ground, the substance, and the dynamic of the contradiction between men and women can, in the capitalist mode of production, develop for themselves. Its dynamic, on the ground of this reproduction, is labor in the capitalist mode of production: always necessary, always in excess. The contradiction between men and women does not merge with the class struggle, but the pairing is not random, neither theoretically or historically.

which only achieves the existence of a mask (the problem of labor exists in the form of....). The form is not more than one appearance.

* * *

Let us address the specific content of the gender distinction and the contradiction between men and women as particularity of the totality. Let us expose here, in an inevitably simplistic way, the architecture of the reasoning.

As in the text of TC 23, we established the group women starting from surplus labor and the population as principal productive force. We add that what we took for granted, surplus labor and necessary population, requires firstly the more or less violent ascription of women to their definition, a reduction to their reproductive capacity. "Reproductive capacity" is not "given" and "used", it is constructed and appropriated (see the "responses" to the first two questions).

In all this, the categories of the CMP (capitalist mode of production) are sexed. Labor, and population of course. And also, the wage relation : the separation of production and reproduction ; reproduction in the sphere of circulation ; payment not of labor but of the reproduction of labor power and of the "race of workers". But also, the distinction of labor, property, exchange. On this latter point, the market seems neutral in relation to the gender because the market is not neutral in relation to gender. In a mode of production where all production is destined for sale, the market defines the social character of this production as public, therefore the gender distinction could be considered non-pertinent internally, because it is presupposed in the very existence of the thing.⁵⁰

50 There is still a necessity to show the specifically character of each category. However when the finger points at the moon, it's the moon at which we should gaze, not the finger. Thus, they are not the concepts of value, the market, or the division of labor which should

The sexed character of all categories of capital signifies a general distinction in society between men and women. This general distinction acquires as its social content that which is the synthesis of all the sexuations of the categories: the creation of the division between public and private. This distinction is the synthesis because the CMP is a political economy. In other words, the CMP, because it rests on the sale of the labor power and a social production that does not exist as such on the market (value), rejects as “non-social” the moments of its own reproduction which escape direct submission to the market or to the immediate process of production : the private. The private is the private of the public, always in a hierarchical relation of definition and submission to the public. As general division and given its content (socially produced), it is naturalized and it actually exists in the framework of this society as natural division: all women, all men. It is not enough to say that all the categories of the capitalist mode of production are intrinsically sexed. It is necessary also that this general sexuation is given a particular form: the distinction between public and private where the categories men and women appear as general, more general even than the differences of class which are produced as “social” and “natural.” The distinction between men and women acquires its own content at its level, specific to the level produced, which is to say, specific to the distinction between public and private: nature (that which the social has produced at the interior of itself as non-social and which actually comes to appear as obvious, natural, because of the anatomical distinction). The distinction between men and women as relation wouldn’t be a social relation without “appearing” as natural, as a commodity wouldn’t be a social relation without appearing as a thing, or the wage, the value of the work force, without appearing as the “price of labor”. Denaturalization is only possible when you take naturalization

be critiqued because they are sexed, but the reality which is realized adequately by and through these categories.

seriously. The authoritative definition of woman was the biology of social “naturalism”. This biologization has some actual effects on the m/w relation, and on the nature of its overcoming.

The public/private distinction shows that, in the capitalist mode of production, the definition of women is globally constrained to their role as childbearers. For instance, one does not move (either logically or socially) from the appropriation of women as reproducers to domestic labor. Domestic labor is an element of the social device [dispositif] that defines and assigns the group “women” to this reproductive capacity. Domestic labor, positioned within the division of labor, forms of integration/interpellation [insertion] in the immediate process of production, “atypical” forms of the wage system, everyday violence of marriage, family, negation and appropriation of female sexuality, rape and/or the threat of rape, all these are the frontlines where the contradiction between men and women plays out, a contradiction whose content is the definition of men and women and the ascription and confinement of individuals to these definitions (none of these elements is accidental). These frontlines are the loci of a permanent struggle between two categories of society constructed as natural and deconstructed by women in their struggle. The frontlines are never stable. The public-private distinction is constantly redefined: the present “parity” is a redefinition of its boundaries but also a redefinition of what is private.

If the abolition of the gender distinction is necessary from the point of view of the “success” of communization, it is not in the name of the abolition of all the mediations of society. It is in its concrete and immediate character that the contradiction between men and women, imposes itself on the “success” of communization”, against what that relation implies in terms of violence, invisibilisation, the ascription to a subordinate position. If the abolition of the gender distinction becomes necessary for communization, it is because the contradiction and exploitation

which define women exist in everyday life and from this situation, from this contradiction, we begin to talk of the necessity of the abolition of gender. The gender distinction that is the contradiction between men and women as it exists and takes place allows us to speak of its necessary abolition and of the necessary abolition of all the mediations for the “success” of communization. If we analyze the gender distinction from the point of view of its abolition, it is because we begin with its current material existence. From whence, the following point.

It is the very dynamic of this contradiction that makes the contradiction exist as a particularity of the totality which is capital as ongoing contradiction. Women do not want to remain what they are, as Marx wrote about the proletarians in *The German Ideology*. If they do not want to remain what they are, it is because their situation is a contradiction within and for the capitalist mode of production: labor as problem (the “apparent contradiction”, population as principal productive force, is no longer self evident in capitalism, the natural distinction is undermined by contingency). But, labor as a problem doesn’t take the form of the struggle of women, labor as problem is the struggle of women against their definition as women. One can say that the tendential fall in the rate of profit is not “the basis” of the class struggle but directly a contradiction between capital and proletariat. One can say that labor (or the population, principal productive force) as a problem (the “apparent contradiction”) is directly a contradiction between men and women.

Labor as a problem is the very dynamic of the contradiction between men and women (it does not merely take the form of this contradiction), labor as a problem is the dynamic through which this particularity exists as a particularity of the totality : Capital as ongoing contradiction. Capital as ongoing contradiction doesn’t determine itself as a double contradiction: between men and women on the one hand, and between capitalists and proletarians on the other. Unity as living, active unity, is the necessary

relation between the two contradictions by which the unity makes them its own and acts as their unity.

The necessary relation between these two contradictions is at first, historically, an experiential fact. The activity of women in the class struggle always introduces within itself the contradictory relation of women to men: the refusal to be relegated to the subaltern tasks or to tasks associated with their social role in “private”; the outbreak of the private into the public sphere as a transgression of their separation; the pleasure of being together for example during an occupation; the sexuality which haunts all female acts within the class struggle, whether it be the presence of militia women on the frontlines in Spain, or during a strike with occupation for days and nights (one could say that *de facto* women’s struggle spontaneously takes the form of an emancipation). More specifically, women’s struggles against the appropriation of their time, of their person, of their body (only women have a body, “are a body”) also invoke the class distinction in a perpendicular fashion, both unifying and cleaving the distinctions between “bourgeois women” and “proletarian women”. In the same way, it also cuts across the struggles for equality of conditions and of rights. The “household worker” can feel threatened by this freedom and this equality as she doesn’t have the cultural and social capital needed in order to validate this “freedom”.

It is quite easy and trivial to show that exploitation, the contradiction between proletariat and capital, defines capital as ongoing contradiction. (*Théorie Communiste* has long shown this). But exploitation is not conceived as a particularity of the totality, but as an immediate identity with the totality of capital as ongoing contradiction. The gender distinction and the men/women contradiction in its specific content and in all its frontlines are not acknowledged like the other particularities of this totality: in their difference and their unity.

We are thus, for an instant, in the presence of two contradictions which each exist as particularities of the totality on account of their specificity.

In all this, this totality is nothing but their necessary relation, or rather, as necessary relation they exist inevitably conjoined, as capital as ongoing contradiction (or contradiction between surplus labor and necessary labor). If each of these contradictions exists as a particularity of the totality, and is this particularity because of a specific dynamic, this means that capital as ongoing contradiction is their unity. Unity in which contradictions do not exist insofar as they are conceived apart from their unity. The current solution to the problem is to say that each intersects with the other, and this amounts to saying that they exist together without saying why nor how, without producing and deducing their “co-existence”. This is the problematic of the “complexity” which contents itself with coexistence without unity. To say that each contradiction intersects with the other is not false, but it is necessary to conclude that they do not exist insofar as they exist independently, they intersect and conjugate antagonistically (antagonistically: in the class struggle it is not irrelevant whether a proletarian is male or female, because the proletariat is male) as a single movement : capital as ongoing contradiction. Woman, man: proletarian, capitalist, no subject is pure. Each contradiction in its specificity doesn’t disappear, but it is internally (as particularity of the same totality) prevented from recognizing the other as its own. It matters that there are two contradictions and four terms -- it’s for this reason that the dynamic is unique, that of capital as ongoing contradiction and of its overcoming.

The contradiction between men and women doesn’t erupt within the class contradiction, but modulates it constantly in the same way that exploitation constantly modulates the contradiction between men and women. Their entanglement constitutes a succession of historical configurations in the class struggle as well as a succession of historical configurations of the contradiction between men and women. The struggle of women who do not want to remain who they are has a history: from the demands for equality of civil and political rights, the demands for equality

in work, to the calling into question of their own definition (in 1970's feminism, where the body itself becomes the object of demands and social critique) which overcomes the paradox of feminism as articulated by Joan W. Scott.⁵¹ It is false to say that the class struggle, or its overcoming, depends on the contradiction between men and women -- just as it would be false to say that the overcoming of the categories men and women depends on the class struggle. They are particularities of the same totality insofar as they are specific contradictions (by their specificity, the whole is not self-determining), they are constantly constructing and are constructed by one and the same movement (inside of which their entangled and antagonistic relationship is always historically specific) of a succession of cycles of struggles (class struggle/ gender contradiction, and one on account of the other) always historically defined. Two contradictions, four elements, but one single movement, one single dynamic, that of capital as ongoing contradiction. Through this, each contradiction by its specificity exists as particularity of the totality (the "self-determination of the whole" is a speculative trap). The struggles that constitute these cycles are always the antagonistic entanglement (the class struggle is always related to the general contradiction between men and women, just as the latter is always connected to the cleavage between classes) of the contradictions between classes and genders

Particularities of one totality insofar as they are specific contradictions (by their specificity, the whole is not self-determined) build and are built constantly by each other as a single movement (inside of which their antagonistic entanglement is always historically specific) of the succession of cycles of struggles (class struggles/ gender contradiction,

51 To demand equality and the absence of difference in name a group and by the action of a group which we have defined as private [particulier]. (Joan W. Scott *La citoyenne paradoxale* ; titre original *Only paradoxes to offer* Harvard University Press, 1996)

and one because of the other) which are always historically defined. Two contradictions, four elements, but one single movement, one single dynamic, that of capital as ongoing contradiction. Each contradiction exists in its specificity as a particularity of this totality (the speculative trap is the self-determination of the whole). Struggles which constitute these cycles are always, if considered in the unique dynamic of capital as ongoing contradiction, the antagonistic entanglement (the struggle of classes always has issues with the general contradiction between men and women, while the latter always has issue with the division of the classes) of class and gender contradictions.

If considered as particularities of the same totality, do these two contradictions have the same relation to this totality? In other words, are the contradictions heirarchized in their relation to the whole? Yes, in the course of their history. No, in terms of their overcoming of their shared totality. The sexed character and sexed hierarchy of capital's categories, the very definition of the group woman and its subordination to the private, mean that the contradiction between men and erupt on the public scene as the intermediary of the contradiction between classes. It's always during the crisis of social reproduction that the unity of these two contradictions is brutally and publicly re-established⁵². The struggles of women (comrades

52 We take here again a "dialectical model," used by Marx in relation to the passage from the possibility to the reality of crisis: "Les économistes qui nient la crise s'en tiennent uniquement à l'unité de ces deux phases (phase de production et phase de circulation, nda). Si elles étaient uniquement séparées sans être unes ("sans faire un tout" – traduction Rubel dans Ed. Pléiade, t.2, p.478), c'est alors précisément qu'il n'y aurait pas de possibilité d'établir de force leur unité ("le rétablissement violent de leur unité serait impossible" - idem), pas de possibilité de crise. Si elles étaient uniquement unes ("si elles faisaient un tout" - idem), sans être séparées, il n'y aurait pas de possibilité de les

but women) are neither useful nor useless “for the class struggle” -- they exist, whether or not they are taken into consideration, and they had better be taken into consideration. It will then depend on their particular historical aggregation to know if their antagonistic entanglement is for each one the sign of the impossibility of its overcoming (programmatism) or the possibility of their common overcoming (i.e. communization)

Let us move on to the family. Here also the subject must be treated in its specificity, and we do not situate ourselves at the same level as when we deal with the definition of women. To treat it in its specificity means that it is in the very terms of the family we find “labor as problem” is expressed. The cause cannot be treated as an exterior phenomenon applied to inert matter, but as a movement inherent to this matter.

It would be necessary to begin by analyzing the formation of the family in the generalization of the market based and capitalist economies, between the 16th and 18th centuries. This formation of the family has a stake in the formation of a political economy⁵³ (cf above and on top of public/private). As Polanyi would say: a dis-embedding of the family in the sphere of production and of its communal environment. This is accompanied by a surge of feelings and love in the western world. For all of its long history, the capitalist family is between two contradictory

séparer de force («leur séparation violente serait impossible» – idem), ce qui est encore la crise. La crise c’est l’établissement par la force de l’unité entre des moments promus à l’autonomie («unité faite de moments individualisés» – idem) et l’autonomisation par la force de moments qui sont essentiellement uns (“de moments qui font essentiellement un tout” – idem)” (Théories sur la plus-value, Ed. Sociales, t.2, p.612).

53 To reflect naively on the expression political economy is a contradiction in terms. It is only in the 17th century that “political” began to be added to “economy”.

necessities: for one, the capital wants only free individuals, without attachments -- on the other hand, it separates public from private more radically than other modes of production because it has made the force of labor a commodity. The capitalist history of the family moves within this contradiction.

This contradiction is initially a contradiction in the family between men and women, a contradiction then between the tendency of capital to absorb the totality of the available labor power into the reproduction of labor power centered around the reproduction of the male labor power of the head of the family (inherent tendency of the wage system). This reproduction as addition of the individual labor powers present in the family, is a contradiction, in the end, between the private character of reproduction of labor power, and its production as any commodity in a specific capitalist process of production, i.e. as an objective condition of production. This is all that, in the terms of the family, "labor is a problem" for capital.

* * *

Public/private, wage relation, and feminine domestic labor are closely interdependent. In the capitalist mode of production, the public and private spheres are radically separated, the exclusion of women in public space is fundamentally more radical than in previous modes of production at the same time as the universality of abstract equality between individuals is an interior force of this mode of production.

By removing the distinction of sex, the law (the state) does not abolish the genders, but merely declares that its effects are not politically pertinent and that they can be forgotten. On one side the law claims to establish true equality of the sexes as a public affair, but it makes the gender division into a non-political difference (non-public), which can no longer be the object of a critique or a transformation. In becoming equal, the State

or the public sphere in general does not abolish the gender distinction, but rather presupposes it by arranging it in the private sphere on the side of concrete men and women. The State and the public sphere are fundamentally constructed on the gender distinction in which they redouble this distinction by declaring it non-pertinent internally and actually pertinent for its very existence. The State and the public sphere do not have an internal need for the difference of sex, they can, on the contrary, abstract from this difference because in it (as such: public/private) is realized the actual foundation of the difference of gender.

The legal declaration of parity and its real application go hand in hand with the interior split [dédoublement] of each woman. As a member of the public sphere, she is relieved of the pertinence of sex difference, she is stripped of her real life and filled with an unreal generality. As woman in the private sphere and private relations of production, she remains a woman precisely because the parity is no more than an abstraction, which is to say, the parity is not something which doesn't exist, but something which exists precisely as an abolition (in tendency/ achieved) of a difference, abolition founded on the reproduction of this difference and on the decoupling and the scission of the female individual. In actual capitalist society, women are actually divided in each determination (domestic life, work, parenting...) between an abstract individuality and a concrete individuality at the point which each determination of concrete life (private and work) is itself divided between its reality and its ideality, so much so that the ideality (the parity in all the domains) appears as real in the distinction which it has abolished (in itself). An unfounded "archaism" and by there unreal, whereas it is only the interior split of each woman. Man is also divided between abstract and concrete, but he does not need to abandon the concrete in the abstract (as man).

"The privilege which man holds... is that his vocation of being human does not thwart [contrarie] his destiny of being male. By assimilation

of the phallus and of transcendence, he finds that his social or spiritual successes endow him with manly prestige. His is not divided. While it is demanded that women, to accomplish her femininity, become object and prey, to renounce her claims of sovereign subject.” (Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, t.1, p. 524)

The woman lives her life, insofar as it is “universal”, in the parity, but if she lives it, she contemplates it also. She carries out her private, personal life in her practical, domestic, professional activities, which are themselves split. All her life is divided, because she needs to be the same as that which is different from her (and as the difference establishes the demand to be the same). As a woman, this individual is commanded to be a self and an other, and confirmed as different in the injunction to be the same.

The distinction is carried out in parity. The illusion which should be shown is not the idealization of the sex difference within parity, but its source: the determination of a public sphere which, avoided by the colors of parity, counters in its own place the reality of inequality and domination.

Equality is battle for women’s access to abstraction. It is not a battle empty of issues, but its triumph presupposes and confirms each woman’s split in the totality of her life, and makes everyday life into a simple fact without right and without reason. Equality (insofar it as constitutes an abstract individual) as ideality rests on the reality of this “everyday life” which is necessarily the abstract expression of the private/public distinction. Abstraction which becomes the reading and the practice of concrete life (everyday life). Abstraction is not the name of a separation from a “real base”, it is the name of the role it plays there: the role of abstraction (cf. money).

Liberal ideology (in the political sense) is adequate to the immediate reality and given in social life, while disguising a deeper reality. It makes of the individual an essence, a constituent subject. Woman, in the equal pair man/woman, is such an individual in which the abstract individual,

objectively abstract, is confused with the concrete individual, so much so that the former becomes not only the ideal form of the second, but also returns the concrete individual to a contingent, accidental form of this abstract, objective individual.

* * *

Capitalism delineates productive labor absolutely separated from reproductive activities in the private sphere. The free labor power which make productive labor must go and be sold. The cleavage between production and reproduction, of home and workplace, is perfect, structural, definitive of the mode of production. The marital family is the family of the free laborer, with due respect to Engels. Domestic space is socially delineated as an exclusion and imprisonment. Women can enter in the labor market, but on the basis of this exclusion. Their entrance into the labor market, their participation in productive labor, is always defined as the work of “those which exist in this way” and by which the value of labor power is devalued.

Capital has a problem with female labor because if it is eager to integrate women directly to its service, this will influence the relation between necessary and surplus labor through the value of labor power. For this reason, capital is always in an antagonistic and ambivalent relation to female work.

Capital has at its disposal three ways to usurp domestic labor time, either by leaving it the way it is, as housework (in this case, it usurps insofar as reduction in the part of the working day which is comprised by necessary labor), or by absorbing this time (in other words, absorbing women), in which case necessary labor time will increase in the long term, or finally by combining both, winning on both sides. This third solution is of course preferred by the capitalist, but in this case capital would have to incessantly compose through female labor, in a diachronic manner, in

the re-division of salaried work in the individual duration of the life of each worker, what is considered in the synchronic fashion a cutting up of female employment in age groups. For more than 20 years, the ‘solution’ has been part time work, imposed in the vast majority of cases. The solution has been the international migration of women to do work related to care.

Cooking for the family is not considered free productive labor on account of the fact that cooking can be bought (any more than changing the oil in the car). It is wrong to think that work must be paid. However, if there is not, in the family setting, unpaid productive labor, then from the nature of the wage itself, the family is a place of economic exploitation, that of women which immediately benefits the spouse, which is to say men in general. We have here an exploitation which passes for a relation of domination which rises from the wage : domination and supply of domestic labor are forms firstly dependent on surplus labor and, secondly, on the form of the wage relation.

To say that wages pay the reproduction of labor power and of the “race of workers” makes us cross the threshold of “intimacy”. Only a non-programmatic theory of class struggle and a theory of revolution as abolition of all classes, as abolition of the proletariat and the wage system can take into account the antagonism included in the wage as reproduction of labor power and even more, consider that this internal antagonism is and must be a determinant element in the abolition of the wage system.

* * *

The content of the construction of the capitalist family is the history of the wage system, and its decomposition in direct and indirect wages -- in brief the integration and the reproduction of labor power as collective and social force in the cycle of capital. In other words, the future of capital in the specifically capitalist mode of production. One could also describe this process as one of a relation between business and reproduction of

the assemblage of capitalist society; the relation between the two first moments of exploitation and the third.

The first effect of industrialization is to augment “exploitable human material”, which is not inevitably exploited, and to elevate the degree of exploitation.

“The value of labour-power was determined, not only by the labour-time necessary to maintain the individual adult labourer, but also by that necessary to maintain his family. Machinery, by throwing every member of that family on to the labour-market, spreads the value of the man’s labour-power over his whole family. It thus depreciates his labour-power. To purchase the labour-power of a family of four workers may, perhaps, cost more than it formerly did to purchase the labour-power of the head of the family, but, in return, four days’ labour takes the place of one, and their price falls in proportion to the excess of the surplus-labour of four over the surplus-labour of one. In order that the family may live, four people must now, not only labour, but expend surplus-labour for the capitalist.” (Capital Vol 1, New World Books edition, p 395).

The mechanization of modern industry universalizes “exploitable human matter” because it is no longer tributary of anything other than the capitalist relation itself in order to be exploitable. It is no longer an agent of trade, and for a prior social history, it suffices that it is free. Any individual is then presupposed as an integral part of this exploitable human matter and belongs, in his freedom, to capital, before even, individually, his labor power enters in a particular labor process. This is the beginning of a process in which all the individual labor powers become independent and in which globalisation of their reproduction is not familial but social. The result is that the current labor market in which the addition of family revenue, when the family system persists (it is no longer a condition of the reproduction of labor power) is not the final instance of the reproduction of each of these components, but a simple median term put in relation to

reproduction of the individual labor power and the global reproduction of the global force of social labor.

Up until the end of the 19th century, fluctuations of employment, “accidents of life”, and the brief rearing of children until the time when they can be productive, are “regulated” by the individual foresight of the worker, some mutual aid societies, charity, begging, and illegal activities, and also by the paternalism of the bosses. There is also still the possibility of taking refuge in the countryside, enlarging the family, worker nomadism, and for women the regulation of their activities through marriage. “Even as citizens, the artisan and their workers continue to live in perfect symbiosis with the rural. No clear border separates the workshop from its environment. (...) This isn’t only true for the cottage industry. Manufacturing itself, in the beginning, is strongly subject to the law of the cultural and social rural hegemony.” (Jacques Le Goff, *Du silence à la parole : droit du travail, société, Etat, 1830-1985*, Ed La Digitale, p. 26).

The first mode of adaptation leads to the dispersal of manufacturing, the extension of the putting-out system, to which the factory system is opposed from the 18th century on, the factory system. Nevertheless, even in this case it must adapt itself to peasants who are in the factory only to round out their income, and leave immediately as soon as the agricultural work requires them to leave, or as soon as they feel like they have enough money to survive. The rebellion of the national workshops in June 1848 in Paris, with the influx of unemployed workers coming from the country, marks nonetheless the emergence of a working class that does not benefit from the ability to take refuge in the country.

Little by little, the small domestic workshops disappear and give way to the big manufacturing establishments. At the same time, the latter close themselves off from the rural environment -- externally and materially with the birth of industrial architecture, and internally through the disciplining of labor. (cf. J.P De Gaudemar, *L’ordre et la production*, Ed

Dunod ; et Gérard Noiriel, *Les ouvriers dans la société française XIX^e s – XX^e s*, Ed Le Seuil.).

As waged labor becomes generalized, and as its relationship to capital becomes its very principle of renewal, the working class becomes a legal subject. In France the 1864 strike laws and the 1884 legalization of unions, the working class as a collective worker begins to take the place of an aggregate of individual isolated workers. It is only gradually that the working class becomes defined by waged labor and the labor market. The social modalities of the reproduction of labor power become formalized with the labor contract at the same time that the specifically capitalist family becomes formalized. The wage system becomes really and explicitly the reproduction of social labor force and of the “race of workers”, it gives the family a specifically capitalist content. Through the evolution of the wage system in direct and indirect wages, this particularly capitalist construct of the family as a place which is exclusively devoted to the reproduction of the work force becomes the subordinate place of women in specifically capitalist terms and relationships. The social process is consubstantial with the formation of a worker identity which marks this period of capitalism. The worker identity is constituted as a masculine identity: the male worker employed full time in modern industry. It is through the formation of the wage system in direct and indirect wages, that workers identity appears through this central figure. The male worker employed full time become the subject of rights applied to its reproduction by which the family is now defined.

With the appearance of the “collective worker”, that is, the definition and determination of social labor in capitalist society, the wage doesn’t change fundamentally, but the elements which determine it break apart. The wage is always fixed around the value of the reproduction of labor power, it must also allow for the constant entrance of new proletarians on the market, but now capital must also be concerned with

this reproduction and not just send it back to the country (“exteriors”) and therefore consider it as having no cost.

What is new at the beginning of the 20th century, is that that part of the wage devoted to the renewal, which ensures the maintenance of the workforce, becomes autonomous from direct wages, and becomes something that is planned. The social character of the reproduction of the working class becomes autonomous in relation to the individual workers, and becomes “social”. The social takes locates itself in a particular space between politics and economics. The social character of the reproduction of labor power as a whole, in becoming autonomous from the individual worker, no longer depends directly on his immediate work, nor even on the fact that as an individual, he works. But at the same time as these old forms of regulation become obsolete, the “social” creates a new form, which is applied to the family.

The model of the labor contract of the male adult worker takes hold in modern urban industry. Married women and youth take the subordinate role in the relation to the head of the family : if the husband works, the woman does not have the right to unemployment benefits. Demands formulated in terms of “social rights” took these categories as a point of departure, thereby consolidating the distinction between workers and the unemployed, of men and women, between youth and adults. The “social rights” accentuate the discriminations between sex, age, sectors of the working class, professions, and completion of the process of state-formation and of the production of the family as the reproducer of labor power.

A politics of organization and of rational management of the workforce takes shape, within which the family plays a central role. The wage, established by collective bargaining, escapes the individual worker. It implies a mediator -- the union delegate. The indirect wage also escapes the individual worker, and implies a mediation -- the family, of which

the worker is both the representative and the chief, insofar as the family must, as a social space, ensure his reproduction.

Since the mid- 1970's and the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production, all the changes in employment and the labor market have had as their goal and content the imposition of unemployment, precarity, and flexibility in the heart of wage labor. The system that segments labor power and creates categories is targeted towards populations produced as particularities in particular zones (neighborhoods, towns, ghettos). Thus, more and more categories crystallize within the available global workforce, and politics are increasingly differentiated in their relation to wage labor. At the beginning of the 70's, with the restructuring of the labor market into increasing heterogeneity and segmentation of labor power, those who were "excluded" are considered and constructed as a residual population in relation to the general logic of the relation between employment and unemployment.

At the heart of the crisis of the first phase of the real subsumption of work to capital is the failure of what is often referred to as the "Keynesian deal" or the "Fordist compromise." What is relevant here is the collapse of the politics of full employment and the pseudo-"sharing" of the gains of increasing productivity. The collapse of the male, waged model of full time employment at a consistent place of work, is accompanied by the increase of female labor, of part time labor, (female labor and part time labor tend to be associated with one another) of temporary work, of the dispersal of the factory, of subcontracting, in other words, of a proliferation of intermediary situations. The accumulation of capital was no longer confined to the national sphere, each State can therefore no longer consider the wage "as an investment" according to the Fordist formula. Work and value of the labor power become a variable of adjustment of external competition. Any politics oriented towards jump-starting the economy or a social wage for unemployment is condemned. It was the epoch of

Barre, Thatcher, and Reagan. All the social models, the dynamic modalities of exploitation of the workforce and its reproduction, deployed pretty much everywhere in the developed capitalist world during the 30s and immediately post-war, disappear.

In general, it is the exteriorization of the social, outside of the direct relation of exploitation of labor, that tends to disappear in the contemporary situation. The solidification of the situation of the waged laborer, its irreversibility and the socialization of its reproduction, have broken, in the framework of real subsumption, the interiorization in the workplace of the fluctuations of activity and employment (paternalism pushed this to such an extreme that it became a caricature), where sending back the fluctuations which were extremely exterior to the immediate capitalist relation of exploitation (return to the countryside, withdrawal to the family, etc.) the worker now has to deal with these things, and he does so through his nomadism and individual or mutual prudence, planning for the future. In the first phase of real subsumption, the social is externalized as national politics, dealt with collectively and socially, it is exteriorized without businesses or individual people, it takes the form of social rights guaranteed by the State and the social institutions and defines the family as its

The current phase of capitalist development puts the reproduction of labor power back into labor, as a form of its perpetuation and its execution.

There is a logic of the “activation of social welfare,” the objective of which is to promote progressive social security taxes, while limiting the decreasing scale of the transfers, through in work benefits intended to make up for the “welfare trap.”⁵⁴

54 The theory of the “welfare trap,” “poverty trap,” or “unemployment trap,” argues that in some cases getting a job with wages subject to tax and government levy can disadvantage a person more than staying at home, unemployed.

In the United States: Welfare reform, which began being applied in 1997, instates the principle of the conditionality, which means that any person profiting from social security must deserve it.

“Celle-ci n'est plus un droit, elle doit avoir une contrepartie : son bénéficiaire devra exercer une activité salariée, effectuer une tâche d'intérêt général, ou recevoir une formation. Tout adulte dont la famille perçoit une aide devra, dans les deux mois, effectuer un travail d'intérêt général. Le principe d'universalité et d'automatisme du versement de l'aide sociale est ainsi supprimé. Chaque Etat est libre de distribuer à sa guise le montant de l'enveloppe qu'il percevra du gouvernement fédéral. Avec cette condition : en 2002, les Etats doivent être en mesure de prouver qu'environ 50% de leur “clientèle” du Welfare est au travail. Sinon, ils perdront une portion non négligeable de la dotation fédérale. Entre janvier 1993 et novembre 1996, 2,5 millions de bénéficiaires du Welfare ont été rayés des registres. En supposant que les deux tiers des bénéficiaires d'aides sociales trouvent du travail et que les Etats maintiennent leur niveau de financement, ce sont, avec la nouvelle loi, 2,6 millions de personnes qui vont tomber en dessous du seuil de pauvreté (32,4 millions d'Américains, soit 13,5% de la population entrent déjà dans cette catégorie). On imagine aisément les conséquences d'un brusque ralentissement de la croissance économique. Le test du succès de la réforme est donc moins dans la réduction du nombre d'abonnés de l'aide sociale (le principe de la conditionnalité à un effet dissuasif) que dans la capacité de l'économie à leur fournir des emplois permanents. De quels emplois s'agit-il ? De nombreuses entreprises ont répondu à cet effort de solidarité nationale en mettant en place des programmes dits welfare-to-work.” (Le Monde du 13 mai 1997).

“Les principaux effets de la réforme résident dans le passage d'un assistantat chronique à des formes de précarité par le travail (working poverty)” (David Giband, Géographie sociale des Etats-Unis, Ed. Ellipses 2006, p.53).

There are many examples of this evolution of welfare politics. Great Britain was a pioneer on the matter. This evolution goes along with the development of all the forms of employment and the putting to work of the proletariat, which is the extinction of the worker identity. For example: one new relationship constituted between, on the one side, the externalization of unemployment to the level of remuneration by paritarian institutions⁵⁵ and the relief put in the charge of the state, and the other its internalization of part-time work, the temporary work, etc. The localized management of unemployment and the individualization of the labor contract assured the connection between the two. An evolution in which, importantly, temporary work and precaritization play essential roles.

This re-internalization of welfare in the effectuation of labor involves the externalized but internally split “social” applying itself specifically to the family. And the pregnant american teenagers have nothing to do but work... or pretend to work. The family can shatter or present itself in all sorts of more or less ephemeral forms, because it no longer houses a clot in the social reproduction of the force of labor, but instead, it is home to a clotting of the coexistence (simple addition) of individualized segments of this reproduction: a child at school, another in temporary work, an adult unemployed, a woman in part time work, a RMIste, a salaried, full time worker. Each of these positions has its own logic, the ensemble no longer organizes according to a central figure for which it reproduces. There is no longer an ensemble.

All the individual labor powers become independent. In the current labor market, the family contribution of revenues persists alongside the acknowledgment of the family situation, but the family unit is no longer the synthesis of reproduction of each of its components. Rather,

55 Paritarian institutions are non-profit joint institutions composed of representatives of both employees and employers. (translator’s note).

it is a simple medium⁵⁶ connecting reproduction of the individual forces of labor to the general reproduction of the social labor power.

The purchase of labor power by capital is now total. Labor power is presupposed both as the formal property of capital (workers always belonged to the capitalist class as a whole before selling their labor power to a specific capital), and also the real property of capital: capital pays for the individual reproduction of the worker independently of its immediate consumption which, for each labour power, is only the manifestation of its definition as a fraction, a mere aliquot part, of this general labor power that already belongs to capital. Capital did not all of a sudden become philanthropist. In each worker, it reproduces something that belongs to it: the general productive force of labor, which is independent and exterior to each worker and even to the sum of workers. Conversely, labor power which is directly active, productively consumed, sees its necessary labor returning to it as an individualized fraction, which is not defined exclusively by the needs of its own reproduction, but also by the fact that it is a fraction of general labor power (representing the totality of necessary labor)— a fraction of the total necessary labor. There is a trend towards the equalization between income as wages and income as unemployment benefits— there being an institutional contagion of each one toward the other.

Capital first came up against this aggregation of labor power and the labor necessary for it during the first phase of real subsumption. Capital first divided it into rigid categories, because it did not succeed in integrating it, consuming it and reproducing it as a social labor power. The family, as the social sphere where all of the different stages in the life of labor power are represented synchronically, was the synthesis of these categories. This very division now finds a continuity in the interpenetration of its elements rather than the synchronic synthesis. First there is repulsion, exclusion

56 A place where the differences co-exist but are not integrated.

between these different categories; and reunion, synthesis outside them: the family. But at the same time, their mutual attraction as identical things eventually gets the upper hand.

The family is the sphere where this more or less necessary individualization takes place, and little more. The fraction given individually to each labor power as is a mere aliquot part of a total value, which is the value of necessary labor, paid by capital regularly (at fixed intervals). The duration for which a specific labor power is used, the rotation of the fractions put at work, the forms of payment can be endlessly fractioned: the primary purchase has already taken place; the ownership contract has already been signed. Naturally, all this implies the full development of the specific conditions allowing the extraction of relative surplus-value (that is, the previous period)

This purchase which is total because it is individualized, and which is individualized because it is total, makes the “explosion of the family” an undeniable fact, but at the same time as it is falling apart, it is reshaping. Capital needs an atomized proletariat, but the flexibility and precariousness which necessitate the total “freedom” of the proletarian (for example in terms of geographical mobility) transforms the family but does not do away with it. In the extreme case of the Special Economic Zones, which proliferate all over the world, celibacy is imposed and the reproduction of labor power is ignored. The latter, in fact, is left to social structures which are marginal to capital’s cycle of valorization. These structures are always extremely fragile and under threat: small peasant agriculture, informal economy, slums (reproduction is then considered by capital as being performed at no cost). And this, to be efficient, comes hand in hand with an accelerated rotation of the work force. Domestic work does not disappear, it must always be performed; flexibility, precariousness and part-time work are interconnected with domestic labor.

The number of single parent families has been continually growing. In 2005, in France (and the same phenomenon can be seen to a large extent

in the US), 18% of children live with only one parent (which means as well, let's not forget, that 82% of children live with both their parents). In 85% of the cases, these so called single-parent families are composed of one mother with her children (these data come from the newspaper *Le Monde*- 17 October 2008; they themselves use a study from Insee, a French institute of statistics and economic studies, published in June 2008). "The mothers in these single-parent families, who are often less qualified than those who live as couples, are in a fragile situation on the labor market. They must overcome the difficulties that are linked to their situation as single mothers – the issue of childcare in particular – and to the impossibility of relying on the income of a spouse to support the family (...) In those families, employment is often a scarce commodity: only one single mother out of two works full time" (op. cit) In fact, this "explosion" of the family, far from doing away with or overcoming the familial constraints on women, reproduce them and make them worse. Poverty is gendered, that is to say, it affects predominantly women.

This growing poverty among women manifests a deep transformation of the way their appropriation takes place. The economic dependency of women, which is an element of the apparatus which ascribes them to reproduction, has as counterpart the appropriation of women through their private upkeep. It is difficult to assess the importance, analytical significance, and truth of the trends we find here. The complete appropriation of the reproductive person tends not to be the condition for reproduction any more. The marital relation of private appropriation tends to be called in question; the structures which controlled reproduction since the beginning of capitalism are crumbling. This private appropriation has a cost, in terms of the value of labor power, and it is no longer profitable. Social or rather collective appropriation tends to replace it and the reproductive woman becomes "a free person", she becomes a pauper who can only survive thanks to her maintenance costs being collectively supported, provided

she has children; and in case of a divorce, she will always be granted the “privilege” of child custody.

* * *

The family is a problem for the capitalist mode of production. Capitalism depends on the family in order to produce and reproduce its main element, which is labor power in the form of the free worker. But within the family, capital depends on modalities of production that it produces and subdues but that are not immediately its own. We have to turn to literature, for example to Huxley’s *Brave New World*, to have an idea of what a capitalist production of labor power according to a capitalist process of production (that is, like any other commodity that enters the production process) could look like. But then the free worker would disappear and slavery would return.

A completely commodified society is the capitalist utopia. Society would then only be made up of a sum of individuals, absolutely independent from one another. All their relations would take the form of a contract, in which all action is recorded and paid for. All relations would be commodity relations, in which individuals would have no existence outside their legal abstraction: a total and totalitarian civil code. Each act would be measured, evaluated, exchanged and paid for. A capitalist utopia.

The family is an obstacle to the capitalist logic, but it is an internal obstacle, not something that the capitalist has inherited from history which it will eventually cast away. The total socialization of domestic work and of the biological reproduction of the worker is a programmatic utopia. It can be found in Guesde, in Pouget, but also in Lenin as a capitalist utopia integrated to the programmatic revolution. In the capitalist mode of production, it is always incomplete, and it always remains under the formal grip of the individual or the family, because the worker, in the capitalist mode of production, is a free worker. It means, according to its

own definition, that her reproduction belongs to the sphere of circulation and not of production. The worker does not enter the production process as the machine or the raw material; if the reproduction of the worker no longer belonged to the sphere of circulation, she could only transfer her value in the production process, and there would no longer be variable capital or surplus-value. It also means that, if we say that the reproduction of the worker takes place in circulation, we should specify that it is in the “small circulation” which involves the part that is paid in wages and exchanged against labor power and which the worker transforms into means of consumption. This “small circulation” goes on parallel and at the same time as the production process and the “big circulation” which encompass the whole period from the moment when capital leaves production to the moment when it goes back to it (cf. Marx, *Grundrisse*). This “small circulation” gives to the reproduction of the worker a character which is at the same time social (labor power is part of capital’s conditions of existence) and private⁵⁷: it takes place in parallel to the production process and to the “big circulation”.

The populace in itself is not a commodity. The production and the reproduction of labor-power does not happen in the same way as those of a commodity. They occur as the production and reproduction of the worker as a person. If this is a limit or a contradiction for (or within) the capitalist mode of production, it is due to the very nature of the commodity, which is no different than that of the person of the worker. The reproduction of the worker reproduces the commodity labor-power in what is totally specific to it: the worker must reproduce the use-value of

57 “The worker’s means of consumption leave the production process as a result and as a product, but they never enter it as such, because they are a finished product directly entering workers’ consumption after the exchange (...) It is the only moment of the circulation of capital where consumption directly intervenes” (Marx, *Grundrisse*)

this commodity, labor, which is not distinct from them as a person. The worker brings their own skin to the market and has nothing to expect – but a tanning. It is in this sense that, in its own terms, in the forms of its existence and in its rationale, the family is “labor as a problem”.

If the worker belongs to capital even before selling themselves to such or such capitalist, it is through a social relation of production, not a production process which produces the worker. The specificity of the commodity she must sell means that she herself has to bring it to the market and is responsible for its reproduction. Contrary to the slave, the free worker must take care of itself. It is in this interstice, essential but tenuous, constantly attacked by capitalism but that it cannot destroy, that the family, however broken it is, has its place in the capitalist mode of production. Capital works its way into private life and regulates its most intimate parts, it plans the number of births, it organizes illness and death, fills leisure time, produces tastes and feelings, as tools. In short, it produces this historical social figure: the autonomous person who reproduces themselves for capital. One of the tasks of this person is the reproduction of the population in the social framework defined by this autonomy: the family. Within it, there is no “property” of the children, just a delegation of power, which is the most economical form of breeding. Indeed, in its rationale, this specific social relation, the family, maintains and reproduces the domination on women, domination which is necessary for the free appropriation by capital of this whole labor of breeding and reproduction. The capitalist mode of production cannot abolish domestic labor, and it cannot abolish the gender division of humanity or the family: They are part of the very definition of this commodity which is so specific: labor power.

* * *

Capital comes up against the irreducible originality of this commodity: labor-power. Its social mode of reproduction must be private. On the

one side, capital can only recognize the necessity of this private mode of reproduction (with is inherent to the wage relation) in order for the use-value of this commodity, living labor, to be the only use-value confronting it. But, on the other hand, the tendency that makes this use-value always superfluous is, for the family, its tendency to eliminate its private character, which is always an obstacle to exchange and to the maximal use of all the forces available for valorization. Here we come back to the notion of the overall purchase of labor power we mentioned before. It is a mobilization of all the forces available, integrating and modulating the diverse moments of their production and reproduction (training, unemployment, benefits “activating” the return to work, single parent benefits, etc...

In the fundamental conditions for the wage exchange (see *Grundrisse*), Marx insists on this point : “On both sides, there must be a free relation of exchange- monetary circulation- based on value and not on a relation of domination or of servitude. In other words, there must be a mediation between the two extremes (...) As it is not possible to directly get hold of the labor of others, it is necessary to buy labor-power from the worker in the exchange process.”

Have we now reached the possibility of “directly seizing the labor of others”⁵⁸, when the socialized forms of the wage secure a link between the worker and her subsistence (RSA, ASS⁵⁹, tax credit, “guaranteed income”

58 . “The form of mediation inherent to the capitalist mode of production (the buying and selling of labor-power, author’s note) allows the perpetuation of the relation between capital which buys labor, and the worker who sells it, but it is only formally distinct from the more or less direct modes of subjection and appropriation of labor by the owners of the conditions of production (our emphasis)” (Marx, *Missing Sixth Chapter*)

59 RSA and ASS are relatively new schemes of French unemployment benefits that, compared to the previous schemes, are putting

... and the fact of going back to work, not as a break in relation to these conditions but rather as their “activation”)? This incredible socialization of the overall reproduction of the total labor-power, which lubricates movement and eases the distinction between the wage and alternative sources of income, must be considered as capital calling into question the “free relation of exchange”, along with the family, as part of capital’s necessary self-presupposition. First, a calling into question of the “free relation of exchange” which ensures that the mediation between the two first “fundamental conditions” (labor-power in its purely subjective existence on one side, value or materialized labor on the other) takes place. Second, a calling into question of the family as the private moment in the reproduction, which is necessary to the free relation of exchange specifically because it is private. A calling into question of this free exchange that Marx considers an “essential formality”. In some extreme cases, which are at the same time neither atypical nor marginal, monetary circulation is even, in part, abolished, as for the French “working poor” who goes to the “Secours populaire” or to the “Restos du cœur”⁶⁰, or for the American who gets food stamps.

Labor-power, the property of the worker, has become the property of capital which the worker must maintain and deliver at their owner’s will. The worker does not “keep” their labor-power “while alienating it”, but this relation itself holds its reversal: the worker alienates it and, in doing so, remains its “guardian”.

The contract is then totally altered, together with the restructuring which took place from the middle of the 70s until the middle of the 90s. As we said, the endless segmentation of the diverse durations in the use of a particular labor-power, as well as the segmentation of its payment,

a lot more pressure on the unemployed to find a job, and that allows them to receive some benefits while having a job.(translator’s note)

60 Associations who offer free meals .(translator’s note)

the turnover of the fractions employed, means that the primary purchase already took place; the ownership contract was already signed. On the one hand, surplus-labor, while making necessary-labor superfluous, still needs it in order to grow. On the other hand, necessary labor is a condition for surplus-labor insofar as that surplus-labor eliminates it, makes it “superfluous”. The contradiction between necessary labor and surplus-labor is a contradiction between necessary-labor and itself: it exists in order not to exist. Used or not, it has already been bought. With the overall purchase of labor-power, the labor market internalizes this contradiction of necessary labor (as continuity between the “indispensability” of labor and its “constant excess”).

The family, as the physical space of the reproduction of labor-power, which used to have responsibility for the social function of reproduction, is reduced to be the receptacle of this addition. It is the intervention of the state which is the middle term between the two extremes: first, the individual labor-power and second, the available overall labor-power. The first is now only an aliquot part of the second. Its determinations (value, qualification) do not exist in themselves, in a primary way, in this individual labor-power. Individual labor power exists only as a fraction of this overall labor-power whose reproduction is socially fixed by capital, through the state. It first fixes labor powers formally- rules of use- before really fixing labor power through its overall purchase. At the same time, the control that the social services impose on the poor is increasing: for example, the threat to take away the children if this new familial framework is “deficient”. The state, this middle term, reconstructs the family and controls it to make sure it is able to be this space of reproduction.

Is the worker still the “owner of its labor-power”? Because it socializes the exchange between labor-power and its productive consumption, capital calls into question its basis: the existence of the free worker and the existing place for its reproduction, the family.

The contradiction between surplus-labor and necessary-labor, the redefinition of the family, the transition from a private appropriation to a collective appropriation of women: all these are linked but are not one and the same. It is always in the terms appropriate to each case that “labor exists as a problem.”

Class, segmentation, racialization: Reading notes

There has always been segmentation within labor power. We must take it, then, as an objective determination of labor power under capital that naturally leads to a division of labor. Here we have nothing more than a divide between a homogeneous material and a simple quantitative gradation of the value of labor power. (Both simple and complex work undergo a kind of osmosis within the capitalist mode of production, from the generalized constraint of surplus labor to specialized labor under cooperative management, etc.). However, this segmentation would not be so if it were not but a qualitative divide within an otherwise homogeneous material. Two processes intervene as they weave together: On the one hand the capitalist mode of production is global, capable of appropriating and destroying all other modes of production while conserving for itself the characteristics of those it has redefined. On the other hand the value of labor power represents a moral, cultural, and historical component. Since capitalist exploitation is universal — i.e., because capital can take over other modes of production or make them coexist alongside it, exploit labor power together with those other modes or detach them from their former existential conditions — capitalism is thus an historical construction that brings about the coexistence of all the different strata of history in a single moment. Segmentation is not merely “manipulation.” It exists as the voluntary activity of the capitalist class and its professional ideologues, which forms and animates an objective process, a structural determination of the mode of production.

If the working class has always been segmented, it is still necessary to contextualize this segmentation. That is to say, it must be situated in the general form of the contradiction between proletariat and capital within a given cycle of struggles. Without this, the opposition to identities

— identities wrongly associated with communities — would be solely normative. Even if we were to confer great circumstantial importance on this segmentation, its being lies elsewhere, within a purity that is either accessible or not. We do not escape the mutually exclusive opposition to identities simply by pitting what is against what should be.

Regarding the relation between segmentation and racialization [racisation], there exist two unilateral stances facing one another. According to the first, materialism boils down to reducing identity to its foundation — without taking its effectiveness or its logic into account. The second, equally materialist stance buttresses itself on a refusal to consider the facts. It says that if racial identity is reduced in toto to its foundation, it's nothing but an arbitrary [volontaire] and detrimental construct. Hence, those who turn it into an object merely divide the class and promote barbarism. (I'm hardly distorting their position). What always escapes both of these stances is the question of ideology, which is not a reflection [of the base] but an ensemble of practical and believable responses. Beneath these operate certain practices. Identity comes into being wherever there is a separation and autonomization of a proper sphere of activity. Each identity or ideology — in the sense of the term employed here — has its own history and *modus operandi*, which can be ascertained with reference to the practices operating beneath the ideology in question. Identity is therefore an essentialization which defines an individual as a subject.

A normative denial of racialized segmentation does not seek contradictions within that which exists, but is rather content to position itself in contradiction to that which exists: class against its segmentation, without considering that class only exists within this segmentation (i.e., within the contradiction of proletariat and capital that provides for its reproduction). Normative opposition to the real segmentation of the proletariat leads to an ideological eclipse of this reality — something the Parti des indigènes de la République [PIR] does inversely, in its own way.

Let us repeat: Proletarian struggles are always produced and developed within the categories of reproduction and self-presupposition of capital. Struggles only ever exist as “overdetermined.” The desire for a class which breaks away from its reciprocal implication within capital to affirm itself as such, substantiating itself in pure self-determinacy, is a programmatic dream. Further, this “surplus” or “overdetermination” is not some residual deficiency or *détournement*, but rather the very existence and practice of class as it is found. In other words, it is the reciprocal reproduction of proletariat and capital — wherein the latter always subsumes the former, which then acts according to categories defined by the reproduction of capital. The fractions of the proletariat, in its segmentation, appear on the labor market as preconditioned because the capitalist mode of production moves within the concrete forms it creates (even beyond the labor market). As a result, these forms confront the process of reproduction as preconditions determining the behavior of both capitalists and proletarians, providing them with their consciousness and motives for action.

This segmentation develops its own ideological efficacy, which then divides the population by solidifying differences. And this is where the Indigènes appear as entrepreneurs of racialization, just as there are entrepreneurs of nationalism, elites which constitute a racket that happily was without much effectiveness until shortly ago. Critique must be uncompromising on these points: tactical homophobia, latent antisemitism, the “understanding” [«compréhension»] of pro-Saddam elements during the Gulf War, the scrapping (“for the moment”) of women’s struggles, etc. — these are not “deviations,” which would presuppose a point of departure that was more or less “healthy.” Quite the opposite: these positions are constitutive of the activity of racialization entrepreneurs, the *raison d’être* of the PIR, which even divides a particular segment of the “immigrant” population with the term “postcolonial” in seeking to define an essential identity. Even if the PIR plays an insignificant role in

the neighborhoods [quartiers], their ideological work is in line with the situation which currently prevails: “Since the mid-seventies, we have been able to distinguish three successive configurations, three ages of the banlieue. A disorganized world, but one close to us, territories reclassified [requalifiés] by drug trafficking and urban violence in a universe marked by enclosure and secession.”⁶¹

We can speak of a feeling of powerlessness in regards to our relation with society, which confronts the individual as reified [chosifiée] collective restraint. Here we have the form and content of an individual consciousness of itself that is properly religious: the consideration of individual alienation vis-à-vis the community (which is no longer a mode of production or ensemble of productive relations) as a state, the inherent misery of human nature. In the capitalist constitution of exclusion, the proletariat’s alienation from the web [ensemble] of social relations no longer appears as the product of its own activity. Nor does its contradictory relation with the rest of society seem to be something of its own doing, but rather an inherent feature of its individuality. These are just the poor, the plebs. Having become inherent in individuality, this separation from the community and other individualities can only be resolved through a relation which transcends all of them as something radically exterior. This is indeed the structure of religion and its production. Religion can thus reunite all the various determinations of individuality and become a powerful lever for the entrepreneurs of identities.

Every identity gives itself an imaginary genealogy, which is both efficacious and real by virtue of its reconstruction. However, this is also the entire problem of identity, aside from its labile, plastic, and fragile character (despite appearances). The contradiction that occurs during the phase of real subsumption also takes place at the level of reproduction. But then again, the path of real contradictions — between normative

denial and the enterprise of racialization — is a narrow one indeed. [For what follows it would be useful to refer to the brief text, “An attempt to define class,” forthcoming]

The site of production of identities is thus the multitude of relations within which class membership is created and lived. Not all of them are strictly economic. We must add these to the process of production: unequal levels of development and their *mise en abyme* under contemporary capitalism, the division of labor, the historic aspect of the value of labor power, the interplay between relations of production and distribution (as well as the predominance they acquire in conjunction with the previous things listed), and the denationalization of the state. The mechanics of production applied here are diverse, contingent on factors like class membership, segmentation of the labor power, creation of the individual as subject, oppression (the “coercive moment,” which contains a renewed faceoff between labor power and capital), and relations of distribution. Here it must be noticed that the *Indigènes* only speak of oppression and the oppressed. Among other things, this is their way to carve out [*découper*] and produce an identity. They give form to a true logic of identity addressed to individuals for whom the defining aspect is “being cast aside” from “true society,” along with a “lack of respect.” What we see here is a constant overdetermination, a constant carving out [*découpage*], of the logic of class from itself: this, then, is the entire problem with normative denial and the cult of pure class.

These mechanisms inherent to the self-presupposition of capital work on relations that are not themselves strictly economic, which form their material. From this work results all sorts of products: religious communities, ethnicities, races, territorial belonging [*appartenance territoriale*], etc.; the possible combinations are quasi-infinite. It’s is all a part of class struggle, and it’s not always pretty. But we have to take part in it

because it's the world in which we live. Not the world of Pure Ideas, but the bottom of the Cave.

One frequent error consists in restoring a constructed identity to its "base," i.e. segmentation, without understanding that if segmentation is indeed its base, then constructed identity will "follow" the logic which belongs to it and function accordingly. This logic organizes a whole world-view, and an approach to the relations of production as well. All these factors are pertinent agents for the invention of distinctions, their variation or disappearance. In Marseille, for instance, an Italian or a Spaniard is just another nice bowling buddy. Racialization, or the production of specific identities, does not belong to the concept of capital. (Unlike the distinction of gender, which is inherent to work as a productive force). But this having been said, race is nevertheless a necessary form of appearance [*une forme de manifestation nécessaire*]. The transformation of a social relation into a thing — in other words, a "paradoxical" subject — is at the same time the transformation of this thing into a social relation between subjects. In a sense, the subject is heir to the movement which creates it. This inversion is the way relations of production really act, disguised [*dissimulés*] as the wills and decisions of subjects.

But the whole social construct out of which this arises now effaces itself. Racial or ethnic distinction plays its own role according to prescribed determinations for itself within the autonomy of the domain of action in which it is created: a black man could become president of the United States, but he is still black. And a black proletarian is not a white proletarian. Existing for itself, within its own domain of action, such distinction can also be made the object of instrumental political activity. We saw this in France during the great wave of strikes in the automobile industry between 1983 and 1984, even up to today. Distinction is an ideology, and as such works well in the assignment and relation of individuals to their conditions of existence and reproduction. Or, to put it another

way, their position within the relations of production. Since all of this real and objective, it can't be dismissed with the grand, ritual invocation of class. No more than we could simply demand that proletarians secede.

This is the self-presupposition of capital we have here: the reproduction of the faceoff between proletariat and capital. Inscribed within the contradictions of the self-presupposition of capital, within its contradictory existence in process, and finally within class struggle, these identities are thus plastic (in accordance with the needs of this distinction, which passes through all instances not directly economic) as well as fragile (in accordance with the capacity of this distinction to reproduce itself).

Here identities can even be points of support in its struggle (contrary to normative wishes), but they are never fixed (contrary to what entrepreneurial practices would like to make of them). Even when they are "affixed" to communities, they reproduce their core class contradictions. We must never forget that all identities are constructed, historical and fragile. Revolution, as well as current struggles like the riots in the banlieues, confront the sclerosis of class defined as a socioeconomic category. But they also confront all the identities built upon it as overdeterminations, its conditions of existence: undermining, interrogating, and calling into doubt ethnic nationality, racial nationality, etc. (2005 was not an ethnic revolt). This isn't an intellectual question bringing us back to recall who is who, since this sclerosis and the struggle against it is the practical confrontation that links revolution to counterrevolution. Class does not always appear clearly. Any such clarity is rare, as it is not the nature of revolution to announce the final hour. It is only within a multiplicity of practices and contradictions internal to capital — in confrontations between all sorts of identities, the actions which stem from and overcome them — that class can transform itself into a communizing class. Or in other words, one that is self-abolishing. No longer can revolution be the

affirmation of a proletariat recognizing itself as the revolutionary force facing capital within the capitalist mode of production.

Whenever struggling as a class is the limit of class struggle, revolution becomes a struggle against that which produced it: the whole architecture of the mode of production, the distribution of its instances and levels, which find themselves drawn into a process of upending [bouleversement] the normality/fatality of its reproduction. This, in turn, is defined by a determinative hierarchy of instances in the mode of production. (Each thing in its own place acts as “cause” of what follows, in the order of bases, infrastructures, superstructures, etc., all of which are placed into the hierarchy). For revolution is itself this very upheaval [bouleversement]. Only if it is successful can it become the moment in which proletarians cast off the rot of the old world which sticks to their skin and keeps them proletarians. Men and women will do the same with that which constitutes their individuality. It’s not a question of pure causation, but rather the concrete movement of revolution — in which the various instances of the mode of production (ideology, law, politics, nationality, economy, gender, etc.) one by one become the dominant focus of the ensemble of contradictions. This conjuncture designates the very mechanism of crisis, as a crisis of the self-presupposition of capital: the upending [bouleversement] of the determinative hierarchy of instances in the mode of production. The revolution as communization would have to nourish itself on this impurity, this non-simplicity, of the capitalist mode of production’s contradictory process. Changing circumstances and changing oneself coincide: this is revolution, this is a conjuncture. Identities are not essences, even if they offer themselves and function as such. Pretty much everyone agrees on this point. If we consider their place and their production mechanism, the question of overcoming leads to questions concerning revolution as conjuncture: upending [bouleversement] the hierarchy of instances and circulation of the dominant.

It would be false to see something novel in this, something that would only arrive within this “conjuncture.” We already entertain the idea that identities are fragile in their very construction, whether these are racial, ethnic, religious, etc. Often identities include a mix of these factors, a mix that originates in the contradictions of class and traverses them.

The object of theoretical and, when possible, practical communist critique, is not the enterprise of identity. Nor is it the normative opposition, which considers terms like class and “identities” to be mutually exclusive. Still less is it “distantiated comprehension” [«compréhension distanciée»]. The object of critique, its target, is rather the lability [labilité], plasticity, and fragility of identity: historicization, “deconstruction,” contextualization. In certain situations, why not, the object of critique could even be the fact that these identities are dynamic processes constituting a particular struggle. And by way of this, a specific reformulation of the general relation of forces among classes. Why not? But even this is quite complicated. The lability of identity construction varies a great deal, in keeping with social and cultural levels. We acknowledge that this lability is stronger in the struggles that are won. Don’t forget that the disappearance of racialization will not by itself bring about the disappearance of classes; it is not a prerequisite. Racialization is also the voice of capital.

A repeat of the struggles in France is in large part currently suspended, under a favorable balance of power, in the autonomous and particular struggle of racialized proletarians against their racialization [prolétaires racisés contre leur racisation]. This could not have been done simply by declaring racialization null and void. It is absolutely useless to call on individuals to defend themselves “as proletarians,” as if segmentation and racialization were not a part of their existence as proletarians. Foregrounding an identity can at once bring about its recognition and de-essentialization, however, which then passes on to an attack on certain historical and cultural characteristics being made into one’s personal definition,

operative agents of social and economic cleavage (because chosen and delimited). Or in other words, to bring war upon the distance that separates the official Law of equality, citizenship, and the other abstractions with which capital operates from the real rules (which the whole world knows are inverse of official Rule) and real conditions of work and life. It's not a matter of simply assuming "difference," so as to rub it out at the same time. "Difference" is nothing more than an inferior status indelibly inscribed onto a person. We must admit that "integration" is a test no one stands a chance in passing, even less so when coupled with the "war on terror." Break with the rules of the game, show that the official Rule is not the real rule, that racial division derived from the segmentation of labor power functions in accordance with its own needs. There is no a priori "all together." Even if this seems "reformist," or an "intermediary objective," this has still not yet been achieved...

Once one possesses a general comprehension of the production of identities, contrary to that of entrepreneurs of identity like the PIR or that of the norm like *La Lutte de Classe*, everything returns to the particular analysis of a particular situation.

Why does such a subject make sense today? Just look at nearly all the social questions. Most struggles cannot help but express themselves in the language of identity, ethnicity, religion, and race, all of which would be sufficient cause for a response. But this does not explain the violence and tension this subject provokes in our "milieu." Purely normative opposition to the real segmentation of class is there to stave off what would surely be the annihilation of the proletariat's general identity, which the militant claims as his own and without which he implodes. He knows his very existence is at stake concerning this issue. What a narcissistic wound it would be, to no longer be able to identify with the "thugs of the banlieue"!

ATTEMPT AT A DEFINITION OF THE PROLETARIAT

The essential definition of the proletariat is a concretion of thought that excludes no single manifestation. It is always present in each of them; these cannot exist except in the totality of its forms and attributes. What then is a class? Let us attempt to provide a possible definition of the proletariat as a class. Definitions of this class have always navigated two poles: a socioeconomic definition and an historical category defined by practice (in early critiques of programmatism, this ambiguity had been artificially overcome by distinguishing between working class and proletariat).

But let's start from an even simpler point: the imperative to sell our labor power. We might add that this imperative has no meaning outside the valorization of capital, which leads us to say that this sale for valorization defines itself both as a contradiction for capital and for itself. The sale of labor power does not tell us what the proletariat is if not seized by its relation à la capital's valorization, as contradiction. On its own, the sale of labor power explains nothing; it no longer defines the class, even if linked to the valorization of capital. A definition only appears when either this situation (the sale of labor power) or relation (of this sale to valorization) are seized as a contradiction by that of which they are a dynamic force: the contradiction between necessary labor and surplus labor, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, the contradiction comprised by proletariat and capital. It is also capital as a contradiction in process. So we have a unity of the definition of class as a situation and as a practice (or "in itself" and "for itself," if one prefers).

Moving on, if it is true that classes define themselves as a specific position within the relations of production, then relations of production are also relations of reproduction. Here the definition of class becomes complicated. We find that normative denial faces a "disharmony" between what is happening in any given moment and Marx's famous phrase about "what the proletariat must do in conformity with its being." This "disharmony" not only attaches to certain momentary circumstances, but

is inherent in the fact that class is objectively situated within a structure whose conflictual reproduction mobilizes the whole mode of production. This implies a multitude of relations that are not strictly economic, in which individuals live out this objective situation, which they also take on as they self-constitute as a class.

P.S. — It would be necessary to produce this tentative definition from a particular place within the totality. Here we depart from a single pole, and not from the whole. This is not so bad, but it is a bit inconvenient.

Where are we in the crisis?

APRIL 2014

‘He took away our desire to laugh for ten years’

André Gide on the Antonin Artaud séance ‘Artaud-Mômo’, 1947

Movements as varied as the post-2011 Arab uprisings, the Indignados, Occupy, the demonstrations in Turkey, Brazil and Bosnia, the riots in Ukraine, the forconi (pitch-forks) movement in Italy, strikes and workers’ riots in China and South and South-East Asia and South Africa and even the events in Brittany, France in autumn 2013 and the current Europe-wide popular support for the politics of the far-right, define the phase of the class struggle, still within the manifest crisis of 2007-08, in which we now find ourselves.

2007: A CRISIS OF THE WAGE RELATION

Within the configuration of capitalism that emerged from the restructuring of the 1970-80’s (the phase whose crisis we are currently living) the reproduction of the labour force was subject to a double disconnection: the valorization of capital was disconnected from the reproduction of the labour force, and at the same time consumption was disconnected from income in the form of the wage. The collapse of the necessary relation between capital’s valorization and the reproduction of the labour force disintegrated the previously coherent regional zones into which reproduction of the labour force was organized. The reproduction and circulation of capital are separated from the reproduction and circulation of the labour force. This crisis detonated because proletarians could no longer pay their debts, and it propagated through the collapse of the particular wage relation that had underlain global financialization (i.e. wage suppression required to ‘create value’, and globalized competition amongst the workforce). The wage relation is at the heart of this crisis.

IT STARTED OUT FINE...

The revolutionary dynamic of this cycle of struggles appeared in the ‘suicide protests’, the struggles of the unemployed, precarious, and undocumented immigrants, the French riots in 2005, the Bangladeshi strikes where workers burned the factories, the riots in Greece in 2008, the more or less demand-based struggles in Guadalupe and the diverse struggles in Argentina: to act as a class is to have no horizon other than capital and the categories of its reproduction; and yet (and for the same reason) it is at the same time to challenge one’s own class-reproduction. We defined this as a conflict, the opening of a breach in the action of the proletariat which was the stake and the content of the class struggle now. This was the only way we could speak of the revolution as communisation. And we were not wrong. But nevertheless...

...THEN EVERYTHING STARTED GOING WRONG.

Wage society

Something reached its tipping point at the beginning of the 2010’s. The sovereign debt crisis provoked austerity policies in the ‘central’ countries, fiscal policy tightened, the hope of climbing the social ladder through education became nothing more than a trap, a leftover from a previous phase. Even the middle classes, the social strata who had until then put a little bit more (or less) aside in savings started to be touched by unemployment and precocity. Categories like the middle classes and ‘the youth’ do not just walk on like new actors into a scene already underway. The development of the crisis constructs these social categories as it afflicts them. Above all, the field of class struggle expanded from the wage relation to wage society. This is the phase we are in. Real subsumption is the constitution of capital as society; the capitalist mode of production as wage society. Wage society is a continuum of positions and competences within which relations of production are experienced merely as relations

of distribution. Exploitation is experienced as an unjust distribution of wealth, and social classes as the relation between rich and poor. Within the structure of wage society and its relations of distribution, the attack on the wage is an attack on (amongst others) the middle classes, which forces them out into the streets. The determinations of this moment of crisis make the middle classes 'temporarily' (?) the representatives of the movement, often in conflictual alliance with the unemployed and precarious, while more-or-less stable workers remain distant, if not mistrustful. From their position within production, manual workers do not take part in the movements or, as in Turkey and Brazil, act totally parallel to them. The middle class, in its never-ending game of hierarchy and positioning, is the point of intersection of the wage society and all its promotions and degradations; it militates for wage society's reproduction and ratifies the self-resupposition of capital.

These social categories appear as the primary agents of the social movements in the 'emerging' countries. China, India, Brazil and Turkey are pinched between on the one hand their functional position in the currently dissolving international system, and on the other their own development, newly acquired and already no longer capitalizable. Nevertheless, the middle classes of the developing nations are unfailingly enterprising, whether the wage society is in a mature or barely viable form in any given area.

As the crisis of the wage relation becomes a crisis of wage society it sets in motion all the strata and classes that live by the wage. In wage society it is always a question of politics and distribution. In its (fetishized) form as the price of labour power, the wage naturally appeals to the injustice of distribution. Someone didn't do their job; namely the state. When the crisis of the wage relation becomes an interclassist movement as the crisis of wage society, this crisis is the delegitimation of politics itself, denounced now in the name of a real national politics. The legitimacy of the state and its relation to society is put at stake constantly in the struggles of the

current phase. The forms this can take, which vary greatly according to local circumstances and the particular traumas of conflict, might look at first sight at odds, but have fundamentally the same basis everywhere; the state appears as both the problem and the solution.

For example, the strange mixture of state bureaucracy and liberalism constituted by the states and dominant classes of the Arab nations since the early 1970's reached the limits of its development and began to disintegrate, but the recomposition of the state and the dominant class, in Egypt as in Tunisia, could not be implemented from the outside. This is the key to understanding the Arab uprising as a long-term process, of which the confrontations of summer 2013 between fractions of the bourgeoisie (the Muslim Brotherhood representing one side and the army, with the short-lived hegemonies it manages to put together, representing the other) were only an episode. The proletariat takes part not only because this counter-revolution is the form taken by the political limits of its own struggles, but because its very construction as a class, by and through the struggle, involves it in the recomposition of the state and the dominant class.

‘The denationalization of the state’ (Saskia Sassen)

Today the ‘global’ is not just the handful of ‘world’ institutions; it is incorporated within national territories and institutions. Whereas the goal of Bretton Woods was to protect national states against the excessive fluctuations of the international system, the aims of the current era are completely different; to incorporate global systems and functions within national states, whatever particular risks national economies might face. The denationalization of state functions operates through embedding global projects within nation-states (fiscal and monetary or social protection policies). The state is not a single unit, and globalization is not a general weakening of the state. Rather it operates through transformations within the state, i.e. the separation of the state's constituent parts from one another.

The logic of the financial sector is now incorporated into national politics. It specifies what constitutes adequate or healthy financial and economic policy. Its criteria and conditions have become the norms of national economic policy: independence of central banks, anti-inflationary policy, exchange rate regime. Keynesian policies were the opposite of this 'denationalization'; an example of what Sassen calls 'national integration'; the alignment of national economy, consumption, education and training of the workforce and credit and currency regulation. It is this denationalized state, permeated by and agent of globalization, that is identified as the guilty party in struggles around distribution in the crisis of wage society.

Class struggle therefore comes to rally under the ideology of citizenship; we see the flags everywhere. In the 'Fordist' period the state came to be the 'key to everybody's well-being', but this mode of citizenship didn't hang around through the restructuring of the 1970's and 1980's. And if 'citizenship' is an abstraction, the contents it refers to are very concrete: full employment, the nuclear family, law and order, heterosexuality, work, and the nation. In the crisis of wage society class conflicts are reconstructed around these motifs.

Ideological reconstruction of class conflicts

We have to begin by trying to understand current ideological discourses theoretically and conceive of them as more than just ripples on the surface; but this is not enough. The project here is to consider them as the practical elements without which the current period cannot be conceptually constructed. Individuals' relations to production are never unmediated. In as much as these relations are exploitation and alienation, the relation consists of an interplay in which all moments of the mode of production are present. This non-immediacy is what in France makes the difference between the Front de Gauche and the Front National, at the expense of the former. Any politics that does not recognize this non-immediacy

can only fail. Although the far-left have got this into their heads, the problem for them is that current ideological motifs form a system which inherently leans to the right; the French Communist Party that in 1977 championed 'French production' also specified 'by French producers'. As an ideology, national citizenship responds to the real problems of our time: the crisis of the wage relation turned crisis of wage society, the crisis of the denationalized state, and the irreducible opposition between the winners and losers of globalization. The appeal to national citizenship is the proof that even those struggles grounded within wage society operate under ideology. However, if it responds to the real problems of the crisis of wage society, it is also unequal to them, because it treats them 'inauthentically' as representations of what they are not; the loss of values and the dissolution of family, national identity and the work community. In other words it only answers its own questions.

This ideology, seemingly critical, only criticizes in as much as it is the language of demands, reflected in the mirror that shows back to itself the logic of distribution and the necessity of the state. The practices at work under this ideology are effective because they offer a realistic image and a plausible explanation of what individuals actually live, and the reality of their struggles. The questions of distribution, work, welfare, devolution of national territories, values, and the family adequately structure individuals' relations to what is at stake in this phase of the crisis. We need to explain how an objective process of the relations of production is reconstructed out of itself as the ensemble of meaningful ideological practices of this specific phase.

Themes of the ideological reconstruction of class conflicts:

a) Territory and locality

Globalization and denationalization of the state create vast peripheral zones excluded from major economic activity. This feeling of territorial

exclusion was what united the ‘bonnets rouges’ revolt against the ‘ecotax’ and company closures in Brittany in Autumn 2013. For the Breton workers of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Picardie, Lorraine or Champagne-Ardenne, the attack on the locality by global capitalism is a plausible explanation for the many local problems, and the preservation of the locality looks like a credible solution. In the vote to ‘limit the number of immigrant workers’ in Switzerland (9th February 2014), ‘yes’ won in the countryside rather than the towns, and in the regions with the fewest European immigrant workers and the most unemployed nationals. The locality is at the intersection of several of the other determinations of the ideological reconstruction of class conflicts (to which we come back later): the conflict of the ‘true people’ against the elites, the ‘intellectuals’, foreigners and people who live off welfare and other people’s taxes. In this type of revolt, the feeling of the abandonment of rural and extra-urban zones, eclipsed by the domination of the cities, challenges the legitimacy of the denationalized state. The motif of the locality links resentment against ‘tax increases’ and ‘bureaucratic micro-management’ under a general desire to end ‘social dumping’ and ‘keep jobs in the country’.

The Brazilian protests of spring 2013 broke out in the midst of massive expansion and renovation of central urban zones, as large portions of those cities sink into poverty and infrastructure decay. Questions of the reproduction of the labour force, and hence of the reproduction of class differences, are synthesized in urban policy: housing (in the areas ransacked by ‘urban renovation’), health, education and transport. The reproduction and social mobility of the labour force are put at stake in the concentration, quality and price of public services. The social relation that structures the struggles and defines the stakes in Rio or Sao Paolo, whether in inner-city evictions, transport, or public services in general, is not capital or wage labour per se but real estate property, which governs the organization of space. Interclassism is the symptom of this social relation

of production. Because it is real estate that structures and poses itself as the central issue of class struggle and struggles over the organization of the city, these struggles concern a 'secondary' relation of production: rent. Although rent is indeed only another part of surplus value extracted in the capital-labour relation, its secondary character is revealed as it coordinates struggles around income and consumption.

In struggles under the ideology of the locality (even with their various dynamics and perspectives) we pass from the wage relation to wage society, then to the wage as a relation of distribution, then to the legitimacy of the existing state. The perversities of the ideological reconstruction of struggles are grounded in this succession of displacements.

b) The family

The ideas of 'liberty', 'self-determination' and 'emancipation' not only don't mean very much anymore, but along with 'choice' and 'rights' have become the emblems of economic liberalism itself. For the 'losers' of globalization they have come to represent a threat, a faint, insidious plot to destroy what people see as the last institution able to protect against 'individualism': the family. The idealised image of the 'traditional' (not to say 'eternal', or even 'natural') family, the protective space sequestered from pure economic relations, with its fixed and reassuring roles, that serves as such an effective focus for claims against the determinations of capitalist development made manifest in the crisis, is of relatively recent origin. It formed in the interwar period, crystallizing around the figure of the male full-time worker, subject of social rights, husband and father, and began to disintegrate at the beginning of the 1970's.

It isn't just the people on the protests against gay marriage who experience 'sexual ambiguity' and so-called 'gender theory' as a threat. These threaten the order in which social roles 'correspond' to biological sex (unless it's the other way round...), where the sexes 'complement' one another and every man and every woman has their 'traditional' place in

the family, the prohibition of abortion beyond question. It's as if the struggle (or rather the simple rejection of the social relations that govern production and reproduction) were fought in the name of the epoch that restructuring destroyed. Now the old world is set up as an idealised negative of today's world. All the more so as this idealized opposite has a fully current value against the ideological function of a gender-theory ideology for which all that exists are free and freely modifiable behaviours; representations and prejudices. The ideological function of this gender-theory is the construction and legitimation of practices that deny the social constraints and determinations that constitute the gender distinction.

When we don't have the freedom to 'behave' as we want, the 'liberal' theory of gender sounds at best like a fantasy and at worst an insult. Against arbitrary conceptions of gender like that of the journalist in *Le Monde* (5 February 2014) for whom 'inequalities between the sexes reside in our representations of them', what resonates with the working class in the conservative discourse is the recognition of the constrictive aspect of the social. Not only is the social constraint expressed (and strongly), but it is positively affirmed. The family is the bulwark of 'the people' and 'real human nature' against individualism, elites and experts in education, nutrition and sexuality etc.

c) The authenticity of the 'true people', intellectual elites, and the nation

Economic insecurity drove a part of the proletariat and middle class to seek security in a 'moral' universe that wouldn't move around too much and might just rehabilitate the traditional modes of behaviour associated with a world now disappeared. The 'elites', which used to mean big industrial or banking families and property-owners, is now identified with the left: experts and intellectuals excessively fond of social, sexual and racial change. This inversion was evident in the USA in the early 1970's and now is everywhere, for the reasons already given: the social system abolished in the restructuration of the 1970's is reconstituted as an idealised

opposite of today's world, now as a form of resistance or rejection of the capitalism that emerged from that restructuring.

We have evoked the importance of the family and its 'traditional' social roles in the reconstruction of class conflicts in wage society. The mobilisation against abortion is at the intersection of the preservation of such family roles and the combat against the elites. Ideology now requires that the wave of legislation that liberalised abortion in the 1960's and 1970's, which had been the result of women's struggles, now appears as the meddling of doctors and judges in family life. In the anti-abortion mobilizations traditional sex and family roles are reaffirmed in accordance with the 'natural order' (actually that of the previous phase of the capitalist mode of production). This 'natural order' has become a major motif of anti-intellectual struggles that, on ideological and social levels, centre upon all the economic and social determinations of the capitalism that emerged from the restructuring of the 1970's.

The rejection of globalization in this period of capitalism in crisis creates a working-class identity of authenticity that serves as a reference for nationalism. This identity may have completely trivial facets – for example in the USA the Republican party represents the folks that drink beer and real American coffee (not 'latte'), who own guns and go to church. The French Front National is the party of staunch secularists who drink red wine and eat sausages and *paté*. There is no nationalism, nor even partisanship of national sovereignty, without an identity of the authenticity of the true people, without the possibility of saying 'us' and 'them'. 'The people', precisely in the multifariousness (demos, *ethnos*, *plebs*) that allows it coincide with the nation constantly menaced by elites, is both custodian and inventor of this 'authenticity'. This shift of terrain and of jurisdiction in the face of economic or social attack is the very nature of ideology as the relation between an individual and the relations of production as their condition of existence.

What would a worker in the oil refinery in Berre, France, previously owned by Shell (British-Dutch), then LyondellBasell (based on Wall Street), who faces losing his job because it refuses to sell up to Sotragem (an Italian trading firm bought by a Slovakian), make of Cohn-Bendit's declaration that 'the emerging European identity has to be post-national. As this identity is fluid, individuals will undoubtedly find it less comfortable. In the most extreme case it's possible that being European could mean having no predetermined identity at all'? You might almost sympathize if he felt like killing someone.

Whether aggressive towards foreigners and 'internal enemies' (Ukraine) or progressive (Brazil), the nation is the language and practical form that economic demands take today. Certainly what most unites East and West Ukraine is working-class nationalism; Svoboda in the West and the Communist Party in the East. We've seen national flags in Athens, Rio, Istanbul, Cairo and Tunis, and if they weren't out in Bosnia, Sarajevo or Tuzla it's because they could only have symbolized the effigy of an irredeemably decayed state, the state against which the workers revolt flowed uninterrupted into a citizen's movement for the restoration of the nation. We saw the flags on the streets of Italy on 9 December 2013 in the 'forconi' movement. The alliance of social groups and ideologies that emerged that day could also prefigure further, equally surprising and disturbing developments. Beginning as a revolt of the traditional middle classes, on 9 December numerous precarious youth and unemployed adults joined the movement, along with local anti-eviction committees, social centres from Turin, the Milan 'social construction centre', the popular liberation movement and the San Siro residents committee. The success of the forconi movement is related to that of the 'Unione Sindacale di Base' in the union elections in Italy's largest steel plant Ilva Tarente (11,000 workers), the general strike they called on 18 October

and their campaign in Rome. The collusion of political, economic and union powers ('La Casta') is rejected on all social levels.

It is only when it is conceived as under threat that the nation becomes a motif for combat, but these threats can only be articulated in the terms that the nation itself dictates. For nation and authenticity to become the ideology under which conflict practices operate a further transposition is necessary. The economic conflict must already have been transformed into a cultural one (this priority only holds within the logical construction, in the immediacy of life these motifs exist in and only in their interpenetration). The conflict between the rich and poor will do the trick.

d) The rich and poor

What we have said about relations of distribution, the crisis of wage society, injustice, and the crisis of the denationalized state as the guilty party in that injustice is adequate to grasp how class contradictions become the conflict between rich and poor. The question is now to understand how such conflicts transform into cultural conflicts where the rich are not who we might have thought they were and the poor are at war amongst themselves.

In the beginning was the work ethic. And the work ethic begot the benefit scroungers.

The first priority is to 'resuscitate the work ethic', as if it were not doing better than ever. The victories of the working class are transformed into the right to be lazy, a fraud, on benefits; an obstacle to progress. However, war is not waged against the workers themselves, but against those responsible for corrupting the work ethic. Class conflicts are redefined so that the schism, thanks to the first transposition no longer between capital and labour but between the rich and poor, now becomes a division between two supposed fractions of the proletariat: the 'hard working' and the 'benefit cheats and frauds'. This crack opens down both sides of the street

(varying according to local circumstances and requirements); workers and the 'lower middle classes' turn against either the more 'comfortable' workers (on permanent contracts, protected by unions or contractual protections etc.) or the people 'on benefits', or both at once.

To a worker, the lifestyles of the rich, covered non-stop in the gossip press, no longer looks like it concerns them, but more like an alternate human race, a parallel universe. So if the welfare cheats and scroungers rob us, 'who pays in the end'? The fact isn't taken into account that public deficits were accumulated progressively and deliberately for 30 years in all western countries, in accordance with the forms of exploitation and accumulation of the capitalism that emerged from the restructuring of the 1970's-80's, except when someone says we were too generous back then. The demise of the workers identity is not insignificant in this process of division. The decline of industry, weakening of workers collectives and precarization of labour translate into an individualized experience of relations to the social and the political. The work ethic is no longer a collective power against the bosses, but a measure of individual merit derived from a personal choice.

The fault line therefore splits open less between capitalists and workers, or even the rich and poor, but now between 'the employed' and 'benefits recipients', between 'whites' and 'minorities', 'workers' and 'cheats'. The Occupy movements momentarily overturned these divisions, but never reintroduced the meaningful divisions of class. The question remained one of income, not of relations of production. From ideological divisions ensued a meaningless ideological disarray. The 'socially assisted' become the 'won't work', and in doing so also helpfully underwrite all sorts of other non-economic distinctions like ethnic groups, the broken disintegrated family, drugs and criminality.

...and to sweeten the deal, racism

In the case of the preservation or 'restoration' of the 'social state' in the name of the social, economic and ideological mirror-world of the post-war boom period, the nation, national citizenship and the 'true nation' get mixed in with the division between the 'hard working' and 'others'. Foreigners are no longer rejected in the name of a racist vision of the nation, but now for a less controversial reason: to protect the 'national social system'. The primary effect of the war on benefit fraud targeting foreigners is to tie the welfare funding crisis to the problem of national identity. This racialization of the 'protection of the social state' follows an identical principle to the racialization of the fight against unemployment.

It is never a question of criticizing the social and economic system, but of making sure that the competition between workers inherent in the wage system bends the working class to the current conditions of the crisis. Immigration is not presented as the cause of unemployment (this wouldn't stand up to anybody's analysis or actual experience of job cuts) but 'only' as aggravating its consequences. The position 'mobilise this resentment now and deal with the structural problem later', was basically that of the French Communist Party at the beginning of the 1980's and is that of the Front National today.

But workers have strictly no power over the supply or the demand of labour. The dice are loaded. If capital accumulation increases demand for labour, it also increases the number of surplus labourers. Globalization and the denationalisation of the state make these threats coherent. The laws of capital accumulation that necessarily create surplus labourers become secondary, they appear to operate rather because the 'national community' is broken.

The conflicts born out of this rupture are destined to be resolved in the restoration of the nation, and competition between workers is no longer seen as such, but now in increasingly ethnicized terms.

If the workers have strictly no power over the supply or the demand of labour, neither do they have any control over the effect of the reserve army on wages, or its subdivision and composition. A large part of the working class now experience a mechanism they thought had disappeared: absolute impoverishment. The same process of transformation of class contradiction into conflicts between the rich and poor now operates within this mechanism, but what's more, under the auspices of the nation, national authenticity, the people, and racism, class contradictions are transformed into conflicts between the poor.

Immigrant labour is the cheapest way to get a workforce that fits this substitution mechanism (related to the mechanisms by which absolute impoverishment operate: the division of labour and mechanization) in which the native worker finds himself without a job, only for the bosses to announce that 'fortunately', the immigrants are here 'to do the jobs we don't want'. It is obvious to him both that immigrants are naturally suited to such jobs and that their presence here pushes wages down. In the west a very large middle-stratum of workers remain stuck within the national structure, and this does not fail to be a source of conflicts between proletarians. The low-paid workers of the global cities, precarious, immigrant and increasingly female, do not belong to a backward sector. That sector is an immediate element of a global economy and corresponds to non-national segmentation of the proletariat. In connection with other immigrant communities and their émigré compatriots in other countries, these low-paid workers develop strategies within the global capitalist system. Therefore, despite their poverty and precarity, in the eyes of this middle-stratum these sections of the class constituted by globalisation appear to be amongst its 'winners'.

The state and the 'parasites'

The restitution of the work ethic not only opposes ‘workers’ to people ‘on ben-efits’, it also has the virtue of creating a third category: the ‘parasites’. You will recognize the ‘parasites’ – they are the elites (not necessarily wealthy), all sorts of arrogant university graduates and experts, employed in the state agencies that regulate and administer everything, live off our taxes, and think they are superior to the authentic people and its values. What opposes the elites to the people also opposes work to parasitism. This conflict is arrayed in the name of values, and even more marvelously, the transformation of the contradiction between classes into a conflict between the rich and poor and between the workers and benefits recipients and parasites succeeds in defining the combatants in terms of values. The main effect of this cultural conflict is to make the economic basis of all conflicts disappear, or more specifically to make the resolution of economic problems into that of cultural ones. The unproductive elite, that represents the artificial against the true people, occupies the state and lives parasitically on the tax revenues. The conflicts that take form in wage society reshape class contradictions so far that arguments in which state institutions are class institutions are taken at face value. The reason state institutions are seen as class institutions is no longer that they represent and serve the economically dominant class (the owners of the means of production), now they appear to constitute and serve a class in themselves. There are strikes and social conflicts, but ultimately they are always about some or other capitalist or company that failed to do its job as capital. The guilty parties fall into the categories of ‘parasites’ and ‘profiteers’ opposed to the ‘ordinary people’ and ‘real producers’. Capitalism entirely escapes the social anger, apart from an imaginary ‘finance capital’ put together for the occasion.

Wage society characteristically dissociates the question of class conflict from the relations of production, and thus opens up a purely conservative perspective, containing all the motifs already discussed, which corroborates

real subjective experience and feeds forms of class hatred that deny their own economic basis. Workers struggles with demands may be widespread and impressive and sometimes take a spiky turn, but these cannot be isolated from the general context in which and through which they take a significance that they themselves contribute to constituting.

To conclude this stage

In the phase in which we are now engaged, the problem of the class struggle is essentially the fact that the rejection of the present situation is not its overcoming beginning from what it is now, as it had been in the beginning of the crisis, but the desire to go back to an earlier situation. Nonetheless, all this is firmly anchored in the present. It is only now, in the current crisis-phase of capital and its state (as the crisis of wage society and the denationalized state) that the demise of the entire social, national and ideological assemblage that had shaped daily life and constituted the system during the post-war boom reveals and imposes itself as the cause and condensation of all today's misfortunes. It is the current situation itself that promotes everything that passed away as an idealized opposite of contemporary society and its crisis, its state, its injustice and its amorality. Everything is at play as the crisis of the state-society relation, and everyone is at play within this crisis. There is a close association between the crisis of the wage relation, the crisis of globalization, the crisis of wage society, the crisis of legitimacy and recognition of the denationalized state, interclassism and politics. This association, this knot, is the current phase of the crisis as class struggle.

WHAT DYNAMICS ARE AT WORK IN THIS PHASE?

a) The crisis of wage society

The crisis of wage society is a moment of the crisis particular to the capitalist mode of production as it emerged from the restructuring. The

question of the crisis of the wage relation turned crisis of wage society is one of a contradiction inherent in the phase of capital now entering crisis. The contradiction internal to that phase of valorization is that between immediately productive labour and the condition of productive labour itself; namely being a socialised labour force, a 'general intellect'. The crisis we have entered comprises the interclassism inherent in the 'socialized labour force'. Even with the many ambiguities that derive from the contradictory relation of productive labour contained within it, the crisis of wage society can be situated historically and understood in relation to the mode of development that preceded it.

b) Instability of the 'crisis of wage society' phase

In their general inter-class character, the social movements based on the wage as relation of distribution that focus around the legitimacy of the state's relation to society, refer to the wage as both price of labour and form of redistribution and, according to the same generality, to all other revenues as depending on labour, i.e. rent, profit and interest.

The wage as price of labour therefore implicates what it conceals: the wage as value of labour power – necessary labour – and all other revenues as transformed forms of surplus-labour.

c) A tendency towards unity

We must not let the real tendency towards unity that exists within interclassist struggles erase their conflicts or let us think that their resolution is given or that cohesion is written into them. Dissolving the middle class, overcoming the stage of riots, and breaking the 'glass floor' which production remains to most social movements, all still depend on the practices of this conjuncture. Why hasn't the middle class been out working for the victory of the counter-revolution? Why hasn't the more or less stable fraction of the working class, especially in the vast areas of

informal economy, been shoring-up its struggles and their hoped-for results, as it did in Egypt and Tunisia? And then again, this tendency towards unity can always be absorbed in politics, as in Iran in 2009. In Brazil, Turkey and Mexico, although they coincide temporally, it is hard to see any community between the different struggles.

The glass floor of production remains the central problem. Not that there are not strikes and workers' struggles with demands, violent or otherwise, victorious or not, but they do not develop into a conflictual synergy with the 'social movements' of which they are nonetheless the permanent and necessary backdrop.

d) Necessity for the capitalist class to strike at the heart of the problem

The double disconnection of the reproduction of the labour force, current forms of globalization, the denationalization of the state and the question of its legitimacy are the contemporary forms of appearance of the crisis. They focalize struggles and the local recomposition of dominant classes.

But the specificity of the current crisis (crisis of the wage relation become crisis of wage society) creates a situation in which the capitalist class is driven inexorably to the heart of the problem: the relation of exploitation. For the capitalist mode of production and hence the capitalist class, the resolution and overcoming of the crisis depends (as it did in the 1930's and again in the 1970's, though in different conditions) on a restructuring of the very foundation of the mode of production: the relation of exploitation. This necessary penetration to the heart of the problem, following the crisis of the wage relation turned crisis of wage society, is the recourse to money creation, which both sustains and overtakes the crisis of the wage relation within which it develops. It becomes the crisis of value as capital, the only crisis of value.

e) Irreducibility of productive labour

Within this imperative for the capitalist class to strike to the heart of the problem is the central question of productive labour. Although each proletarian has a formally identical relation to their particular capital, they have a different relation to social capital according to whether their labour is productive or unproductive (this is not a matter of conscience; it is an objective situation). If the contradiction that productive labour represents to the capitalist mode of production, and therefore to the proletariat as well, did not appear at the centre of the class struggle, we would not be able to speak of revolution (it would be something external to the mode of production; at best a humanist utopia, at worst – nothing). Productive labourers are not, however, naturally and eternally revolutionary. In their particular action, which is no more than their own involvement in the struggle, the contradiction which structures the whole of society as class struggle turns back on itself and its own presupposition, because the relation of exploitation does not relate the worker to an individual capital, but through their relation to an individual capital immediately to social capital.

But what is always concealed in the reproduction of capital (it is in the nature of this mode of production that this contradiction does not appear clearly, surplus value becoming profit by definition, and capital being value in process) returns to the surface not only as a contradiction internal to reproduction (here understood as the unity of production and circulation) but as that which causes the contradiction itself: labour as the substance of value, which in capitalism can only be value as value in process. The contradiction (exploitation) turns back on itself, on its own condition. The way to the ‘heart of the problem’ is fraught with risks.

f) The question of the 'glass floor' as a synthesis of these dynamics

If we consider the large social movements, and interclassism, with their instability as demand-based movements within wage society which conceals as much as it reveals the wage as a relation of production, as a necessary moment of this crisis; if we consider the tendency towards unity not only as a problem of surpassing interclassism but still more as a problem of class segmentation; if we consider the necessity for the capitalist class to strike at the heart of the problem, and that heart as the irreducibility of productive labour, these dynamics synthesize precisely (as much from the point of view of capital as of the proletariat) at a breaking point that, for the contradiction between capital and proletariat, consists in breaking the 'glass floor' that production still is to the social movements that operate on the level of reproduction, but also consists, for workers struggles, as violent as they may be, in breaking the 'glass ceiling': surpassing demands. For a struggle with demands to go beyond what it is, is for it to place the contradiction between classes not elsewhere than the level of that contradiction's own reproduction. It is true that the primary result of the production process is the renewed separation of labour and capital. But that doesn't work without circulation, exchange, and all the other moments of the mode of production including the state. It is in this way, starting from the process of production but through practices that go beyond it, that class-belonging is posed and recognized in practice as an external constrain imposed by capital i.e. imposed as reproduction. It is impossible to determine how this 'juncture' can come about, and even more so as it will no longer be a 'juncture' but a completely new situation, emerging out of many particular struggles, which alters the given order for all struggles: a conjuncture.

It would be against the spirit of this text to conclude on such a flight of generality. If the synthesis of the dynamics of the current phase is breaking the glass floor and/or ceiling, there is nothing inevitable about

it. As in the initial phase of every crisis, this is also the decisive moment for the capitalist class, when diverse possibilities for restructuring, that had previously existed only as the disjointed contours of the general movement of exacerbation of the tendencies of the declining period, become concrete. If we consider this synthesis not as a general determination of 'The Revolution' but as the possibility of overcoming a historically specific relation of exploitation, we must situate it within a conjuncture defined by all the determinations of the present. We suggest that China and South and South-East Asia have a better concentration of the ingredients necessary for the fusion; the extent and power of workers' struggles caught between the asystematicity and untenability of the wage demand, the magnitude of socio-political movements and its critical position with the potential to wreck globalisation's current zoning. This is not to say that the region is blessed, or that they are or will be 'masters of the world'. Only that its importance and characteristics, internal and within global capital, make it this world's weak link. There we have another work to undertake.

BRIEF POST-SCRIPT

The rising visibility of the gender and class contradictions, and their association with the revolution and communism, are now far from us. The fact that for others 'communisation theory' becomes an ideology, whether as a slogan or a passport to the academy, now hangs over our frail heads.

'To be or not to be' isn't the question

JANUARY 2015

ROLAND SIMON

There was the one with the working class Frenchman, baguette and beret, cigarette in his mouth, looking all sad as he hears from Georges Marchais the leader of the French Communist Party that there isn't going to be a dictatorship of the proletariat after all. And the one with a Vietnamese guy on a bike saying 'Today peace, tomorrow go to work in the factory!', or the one about the tragic incident of the 'tragic party' which left one man dead (Charles De Gaulle)⁶², and the strip 'The Complicated Life of George the Murderer'. For people of my generation, it wasn't without a twinge of pain that we heard about the massacre at Charlie Hebdo. Of course, Charlie isn't what it used to be, but they did l'Enragé in 68, so....

Those people in the street on 11th January were not four million 'useful idiots'. They weren't calling for a military operation and the deployment of 10,000 soldiers on the 'national territory' (announced by the government on 12th January). As soon as the afternoon of 7th January, the day of the killing at the Charlie Hebdo editors office, the citizen demonstrations for the 'values of the republic' and 'freedom of expression' against 'barbarity' and the 'Je suis Charlie' appeared spontaneously. There was no need for the state to 'appeal' to the people nor for the propaganda steamrolling

62 Harakiri was finally closed down for its coverage of the death of former president, Charles de Gaulle, whose passing saturated the mainstream media and eclipsed the deaths of more than 140 young people who had been killed after a nightclub burnt down just outside Grenoble. Hara-Kiri's headline read: "Tragic dance in Colombey [de Gaulle's hometown]: one death."

that followed anyway. The state jumped on the bandwagon, not without some missteps like organizing the demonstrations under the protection of a cartel of political parties. On 11th Jan the politicians were actually quite reserved, as they received on a platter this dish, half poisoned by the no longer straightforwardly national contemporary form of the state.

Of course they will use this opportunity to criminalize any kind of revolt or opposition, to reinforce and legitimize repression, to drum up support for their external wars which will now be unquestionably ‘justified’. But the flights of fancy about ‘national unity’ and ‘Jaurès’ or the (less convincing) ‘international union’ of western countries against the ‘postcolonial’ world are not only completely inadequate to everyone except radical rhetoricians, with a whole array of pretentious denunciations of things that they don’t want to and don’t analyse, instead reiterating some eternal truths of the revolutionary canon. Calling the demonstration on 11th Jan a manipulation and propaganda is too easy and too comfortable. Even if that were what it had been, we would still have to explain how that manipulation worked, but it is not that simple. It is a lot worse – the mobilization on 11th Jan 2015 was outstandingly appropriate to this moment⁶³.

This didn’t come like a bolt out of the blue. In every country in Europe whether it’s the politics of the left (Front de Gauche, Podemos, Syriza) or the right (no need to list them all) national citizenship has become the ideology that responds to the crisis as an ‘injustice of the distribution of wealth’. This national citizenship is based on a discourse that challenges the legitimacy of the state which is now denationalized and held responsible for the injustice. When the demonstrators applaud the cops passing in

63 For a more complete analysis of the current situation within which this demonstration plays out see *Théorie Communiste*, Where are we in the crisis? [French versions on the dndf and théorie communiste websites]

riot vans, it's a fantasy of momentarily finding back the paternalist state of before liberal globalisation, whatever the diverse dangers and insecurities, real and imaginary, that threaten their lives may be.

It's these dangers and insecurities that the myth of national citizenship as a protection (from Republic to Nation) fleetingly congeals together. A real nation-state that forms a real identity of national citizens, because it offers some protections, exactly the social form that went up in smoke since the 1970s. But national citizenship has never been innocent – neither in its origins or its implications. It is formed in opposition to the Other that threatens it, and requires the suppression of that threat. Today Islamism, tomorrow (or today at the same time) class struggle or womens struggle. Four million people get together and the most astonishing thing is the emptiness of the discourse. There is nothing to say; nothing to do, except 'Je suis Republicain', nothing to understand except 'we are one nation', nothing else to do except to conjur up a huge representation of the Republic, menaced by anonymous black crows that nobody has any problem recognizing.

The nation only mobilizes people and becomes a theme of combat if it is constituted as under threat; but the threats can only be conceived in the terms the nation itself imposes: its values and its 'true' nature. The citizen is an abstraction from the concrete individual in their relations of production; of class, race and gender. However, it is not an abstraction free from determinations. Equality between citizens presupposes a shared history and culture. There is no citizenship without an identity, without being able to say 'us' and 'them'. Saying 'us' and 'them' is not the exclusive domain of the Front National, the sausage eaters and red wine drinkers. You can say it through the reassuring secular smile of 'freedom of expression' or 'womens rights'. But no matter what, you say it in the language of the state. 'We confront the questions of immigration and of Islam; we cannot carry on doing what we're doing with immigration. When not

linked to terrorism it still creates problems of integration and divided communities' (Sarkozy). It is just a short a step from that benevolent secular smile to Sarkozy.

A good citizen needs to be just as careful as their universality is questionable. 'Take off the veil then' says the Leftist who fights for women's rights, making the domination of women into something that belonged to some backwards cultures and which over here we are doing away with. Because the citizen is from 'over here'. And it is because he is from 'over here' that he is universal. The Jews in the demonstration are right to ask themselves – if there had only been the hostage at the Kosher supermarket and not the murders at Charlie Hebdo on wednesday, would there have been such an explosion of Republicanism? Obviously not (c.f. Toulouse): national citizenship, the universal, is not threatened when one particular kills another particular, even if all particulars are not subsumed under the universal in the same way.

Either for long-term historical or contemporary social or political reasons, a particular can have a positivity by which they are not only a particular, but also belong to the universal.⁶⁴ 'Without the Jews, France would not be France' (Manuel Valls). The particular remains particular. It is not, as it could be, effaced in the universal, but it nevertheless belongs to the sphere of the universal. The particular is a determination of the universal even if it is not effaced in it. The last time a president of France went into the street to demonstrate was Mitterand after the desecration of the Carpentras Jewish cemetery, never after an attack on a mosque, or even a military cemetery. For all sorts of social, political, economic, cultural and historic reasons, all particularities are not equal. Their relation to the universal varies; from inclusion that does not efface the particular, to

⁶⁴ See Hegel, *The Philosophical Propaedeutic*, ch. Doctrine of the concept, paragraphs 2-10.

distrust or hostility. At certain times, some particularities are constructed by the universal as harmful and pernicious – the Jews gave the tragic proof.

Whatever their discourses, the very existence of these demonstrations and the invitation to 'emancipation within the republic' mean that things are absolutely not 'equal' for our 'muslim citizens' (this phrase says it all). The individual does not have the same relation to the universal. It is formulated negatively; it exists only in and as itself; it is part of the Others. Or to be a bit more concrete, even if we cannot reduce the demonstrations from Thursday 8th to Sunday 11th entirely to the frightened and hostile construction of muslims (and 'Arabs') in France as strange and foreign, neither can we understand the scale of these demonstrations without taking this into account.⁶⁵ 'No more playing innocent' we hear the big republicans saying more and more 'these terrorirsts come from your country so it's time you clean up after yourself'. After the attacks of Wednesday 7th and Friday 9th anti-Arab/muslim acts are multiplying, but let's also look at the other side of the coin: the open, humanist position (and save ourselves the comfort of the humanist condemnation of racism and 'Islamophobia').

The humanist demand to accept the 'Other' presupposes that there is an 'Other', its construction as 'Other' and therefore the hierarchy in relation to the 'One' who has the power to say who is the 'Other'. There is a whole social organization, pre-existing any given individual, between 'Us' and the 'Others'. To accept the 'Other' is an invitation extended to

65 For social and economic reasons for this construction, see *Théorie Communiste* No.18. M. Le Pen et la fin de l'identité ouvrière. Since writing that text in 2002 we have changed our conception from 'negative' (the disappearance of the workers identity) to 'positive', an identity constructed in the determinations and social forms of appearance of the crisis (c.f. also 'Where are we in the crisis?' even if that text is criticable, especially on the basis of the strict opposition between relations of production and relations of distribution that it relies on

proper, legitimate society. At the origin of ‘The Ones’ and the ‘Others’ is simple brute power. The ‘One’ is the one with the power to distinguish.

The distinction is the practical, empirical, everyday existence of the universality of the citizen. If we forget about the hot air of ‘true universalism’,⁶⁶ the west can legitimately seize the monopoly on universal values, if needs be with F16s and Dassault Rafales. The universality is an ideological artifact proper to the capitalist mode of production, the abstraction of labour and the value of the citizen. This mode of production is the only universal, with universalist ideological practices conditional on the individual corresponding to its criteria of universality, that is not to be a women or to bear any cultural, ethnic, racial, familial or religious links that threaten the nation-state. The state is a nation-state because it is a capitalist state, it does not recognize an intermediary in its relation to the individual; no intermediary communities or competing identities within itself. It identifies any element that interferes with its criteria of universal homogeneity as a foreign body, specific and therefore harmful communities. There are no more mediations between power and the individual. Without the middle term of the nation-state and its political structure, we start again with the crude explanation of homogenization through the development of capital value, from which point we can explain anything and everything in an undifferentiated whole. If only the state is supposed to represent the individual abstracted of their determinations that is the citizen, the ‘emancipated’ individual, the only guarantee of their ‘emancipation’ is that they belong to and are integrated in the national collectivity represented by the state.

“Religion is a prior, unstable and incomplete form of the universality of the state. It is prior and unstable because when it becomes the dominant

66 Communism will be the interaction of single individuals who are not subsumed in any community; in that much even the name ‘communism’ as a social state is problematic.

ideology under which social practices and relations of production operate, it reveals and claims that the abstract universality of the state is not in the state itself, that it is not 'religion realised'" - Karl Marx, *The Jewish Question*

"The perfect political state is, by its nature, man's species-life, as opposed to his material life. All the preconditions of this egoistic life continue to exist in civil society outside the sphere of the state, but as qualities of civil society. Where the political state has attained its true development, man – not only in thought, in consciousness, but in reality, in life – leads a twofold life, a heavenly and an earthly life: life in the political community, in which he considers himself a communal being, and life in civil society, in which he acts as a private individual, regards other men as a means, degrades himself into a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers. The relation of the political state to civil society is just as spiritual as the relations of heaven to earth. (...) The democratic state, the real state, does not need religion for its political completion. On the contrary, it can disregard religion because in it the human basis of religion is realized profanely. - *ibid.*

"There was something of the sacred about it" - Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet

"The French people have made communion" - Rama Yada

Four million French people in the street, and 97% in the polls renewed their allegiance to 'the true state', and asked nicely to the Other to do likewise, if they hadn't already. In pity and charity, they asked the Others to emancipate themselves. In France such emancipation in the name of the universal is a historic fund of the old left. Given that martyrs at Charlie Hebdo were also of the old left, everything turns out for the best in the best of possible worlds of universal values to defend. The 'muslims of France' (male and female)⁶⁷ had to speak up to denounce 'barbarity', the

⁶⁷ It seems like the 'nice arab girl', a media figure of the 2000's, has disappeared.

say that ‘that is not the true Islam’ and to ‘be present in the demonstration’. So they went, and the Imam that had been invited agreed to get on the television platform and do and say everything right.

But what was there of day-to-day humiliation, rejected job applications, dirty looks in bars? It wasn’t the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda and their long histories that made the Kouachi brothers and Amedy Coulibaly, it was France. ‘The perpetrators of that dreadful crime were French citizens, they went to secular, republican, school, that of Jules Ferry. It is down to France to show that it is not an ‘incubator’ for terrorism, and not to the Muslims, Jews, Christians or asians to prove themselves’ (letter to *Le Monde*). Another reader adds: ‘Those jihadists grew up in our cities, went to our schools and learnt hatred in our prisons’. Mass unemployment, the segmentation of the labour market to the point of racialization and the police treatment of poor areas have shown for a long time that the dominant class knows that it has nothing to distribute, nothing to offer, except the incorporation of the ‘muslim youth’ into ‘French republican Islam’, as an old foreign minister put it. Only a Cohn-Bendit could come up with ‘we need to invest in the banlieues’ and to propose ‘a national sports foundation that supports local sports trainers’. Malek Boutih is more direct: ‘If there is a potential danger, those areas will have to be cleaned up’, proposing that certain areas in the banlieue ‘would be temporarily taken into protection by the state’.

If, as Gilles Kepel says, there is a ‘jihadist centre of attraction hostile to the French constitution’, and if they know exactly where to strike to make it hurt, there is no need to go to Sahel, Yemen or Iraq to find out where the jihadists come from. These ‘holy madmen’ are not our enemies because they are barbarians (our democratic nations and their drones have no need to envy the barbarity of the Islamic state), they are our enemies because their aim is to harden and thicken the fractures in the exploited class which are already bad enough. We do not hope for a unity of the

proletariat (division is inherent to wage labour, and the unity of the proletariat can only be its abolition), but neither to rigidify the existing fractures further under a cultural and religious order that essentialises them. The 'young proletarians of the banlieues' are no more immunized than anyone else against the ideological mutation of class conflicts (and between sections of the exploited class) into cultural ones. Especially given that in the international context, calling yourself a Muslim gives an image of perfect confrontation.

Let the historians decide.

"This was a special day, because 'our days of national celebration are almost always days of combat' - Jean-Noël Jeanneney.

"The first day of international democracy" - Michel Winock

Pascal Ory thought that that demonstration of unity where union or community⁶⁸ allegiances came second says a lot about the state of our society 'to not march with an organization and to come with 10,000 different slogans, as we saw on sunday, is the sign of extremely advanced individualism. What we saw was absolutely a mass demonstration, but one that united mostly very individualist people'.

We could suggest that Pascal Ory hasn't seen many demonstrations recently, where it is more and more rare to march 'one step behind the organizations', but anyway, for this once Ory is right. There was a mass of isolated individuals, i.e. a mass of citizens who could only watch as their community passes in front of them in the form of 50 heads of state. Whatever the individual people thought and whatever doubts they have about that national citizenship given the state as it currently is, what we saw was our abstract citizenship passing (even if not on horseback as it

68 As for the leaving community identities 'in the background', this is untrue: see the massive absence (if you can say that) of the 'muslim community', who given the circumstances could only have been seen as stage props.

did in Hegel's day), and the people as citizens renewing their ceremony of homage to it. They could have not.⁶⁹

"In history, euphoria is often fleeting, and moments of joy rarely followed by joyful days after" - Michel Winock.

Joyful or not, the present conjuncture of class struggles (the predominance of relations of distribution over relations of production, injustices of distribution which are blamed on the denationalized state, racialized division of the proletariat, the 'real people' against the elites, and interclassism) means that beyond a sudden event that deflates quickly, the days after will be played out in the contradictory game between the concrete individual in their social relations of production, and the citizen, its necessary abstraction.⁷⁰

69 The equation of citizen (as such) with the state is currently very unstable, because the concrete individual undermines the citizen and the state no longer exists as the corollary of the citizen and civil society.

70 This is on the level of ideology where the game of hide-and-seek between relations of production and relations of distribution could play out (c.f. despite its shortcomings, 'Where are we in the crisis?')

From outbreaks to 'inbreaks' until exhaustion

MAY 2016

ROLAND SIMON

(on the demos, the thugs and the “Nuits debout”)

The “outbreaks” [débordements] within “demand-based demonstrations” have become their own end, violence is no longer a question, an exteriority or an after-thought; the “outbreak” is the nature of the movement itself, the overflow [débord] goes back into the thing itself until it becomes its known and expected nature; we could call this an “inbreak” [imbordements]. The question of violence is gone, it is abandoned as a question at all. Only TV news say “the demonstrators” and the “thugs”; not even the cops or their spokespersons use this sort of language.

“Neither law, nor labour.” One thing links the demonstrations against the Labour Law and the “Nuit debout”: the illegitimacy of worker demands. If they fashion this illegitimacy differently it is simply because this illegitimacy functions differently among the whole of society and this will always arise in conflicts. You cannot decree a “convergence,” it’s not even a goal: the segmentation of the labour force, the racial and gender divisions cannot be merely tacked onto class belonging, since it is the very way class is experienced and within the same situation the divergences are not merely different point of views, rather they are real points of antagonism. It is impossible to create an economy of real conflicts and of the multiplicity of contradictions by merely recognizing them and tacking them on.

For the capitalist class, it has been evident for a while that for them demands, demonstrations and negotiations have stopped being legitimate

(at a systemic level, one could say) within an internal conflictual process of accumulation. It has not been as evident that the proletariat has recognized this situation as its own and not just one suffered, or in other words it has not recognized capital as its *raison d'être*, its very existence facing it, capital as the sole necessity of its existence. The movement now kicking off in France has yet to define itself, to understand itself, for it is the first movement to feel that is constituted by the structural change in the mode of accumulation and reproduction of capitalism which fell into crisis in 2008. The illegitimacy of the demand within this period of crisis in the mode of capitalist production is in the process of internalizing this illegitimacy into its very pores and it knows it very well. For better or worse. This is where the refusal of demands and negotiations comes from, but then alternatively seeks to create a “Community” which is already losing itself in its formalism.

“Nuits debout” is the social froth of this situation. The “we demand nothing” of Frédéric Lordon could be as politico as we imagine and his desire for us to write a new constitution “all together” calls upon no less strangely an old radical slogan that says to “make a demand” is to establish the legitimacy of the power you are addressing. The numerous palinodies to be found at “Nuits debout” include: the expression of a social class whom imagine themselves the general abstraction of society itself, but the expressions of this class have not always taken this form. But if today the expressions are not marked by the general situation of the current class struggle, the natural penchant of this class lends to national sovereignty, “the good productive capitalism,” “the welfare state” and “real democracy.” Other disastrous musings are not entirely unimaginable. The “Nuits debout” are not just limited to this one class, but it is the dominant one; for the others of the same plumage, with their desire to make demands, they find that when pedaling over the void empty formalism serves as their parachute.

Since 2010 (remember the retirement law) something fundamental has shifted. A certain circumstance, that “materialists” would be in the wrong to down play, has accelerated this shift: a profound moral crisis which France finds itself today. The State is no longer recognized as this huge machine which transforms all its machinery, institutions, iterations and forces of repression from the interests of a particular class into the general interests of the whole of society because it no longer works. An apocalyptic mood reigns. It is because the machine is sick with “Luxleaks” and “Panama Paper.” No one believes anymore in a state power which does the opposite of what it claims to do. Sarkozy stirs up hate, Hollande provokes laughter and mistrust. Speechless violence is the response of he who is despised and has been so from the beginning, without any frills. When the corrupt state machinery transforms the particular into the universal, then of course people realize what it was hidden behind this universalism: the billy club.

Among the systematic, normal, expected, accepted and definitive outbreaks in the demonstrations, in the “Nuits debout” and even in the union marches flanked by the cops we have seen for the first time in France (it seems?) the illegitimacy of the worker demand as not just a “no” from the ruling class and the State, but also the very essence which the struggle itself has realized. This is essential. Worker identity is not lived in a sort of phantasmal way as it was in 2010: illegitimacy is on its way to become interiorized and not suffered, it is taken on, “claimed,” and a constitutive force. All of this is very limited, marginal even, which is evidenced by the way this all has had trouble in becoming a massive movement whether in its many demos and outbreaks, or in its “Nuits debout” assemblies. If it is normal that this movement not know what to do with itself, it is because it has no other content than that outlined here and it is this which defines it as marginal. In the absence of a practical affirmation of the multiplicity of contradictions which constitute the proletariat, the

absence of an acknowledgment of production as the matrix of social classes, an acknowledgment which can only be at the practical level (one which is cruelly absent), then for now this content floats like a consciousness which seeks to emancipate itself, supposing for itself that class belonging is a exterior constraint which can be surpassed with the constitution of a self-referential Community, somehow surpassing class struggle which produced it. This has deep consequences on this consciousness and the practices it puts into action in its name. The outbreaks will continue until they are exhausted and the Community of “Nuits debout” will fall into a series of declarations more or less ridiculous.

Outbreaks, inbreaks and exhaustion (follow-up)

MAY 2015

ROLAND SIMON

(still on the movement of struggles against the Labor Law)

Our position on “exhaustion” of the movement [against the Labor Law] has received the attention of some readers found in our small text, published on Dndf, “From outbreaks, to ‘inbreaks’ ad nauseum.” A few recent events, blockades and strikes seem to invalidate this view. It’s true, the movement is rebounding but how so? It’s not surprising that this “exhaustion” has caught some attention because at the end of the day what matters are the practices, the issues, actions and the views and that we have and/or make and the ways these views act. Despite its garnered attention, this position on “exhaustion” was not the “central thesis” of the text.

The central theme of those few lines was the illegitimacy of worker demands which by way of a simple imposed situation (the minister Sapin just recently declared that “the demands were never legitimate”) becomes in a partial, stammering and spasmodic way the proper comprehension of the movement. The problematic limit of all this was a content which “floated like a consciousness freeing itself of its limits,” as though this consciousness “surpassed the proper conditions of its production.” It’s the famous “glass floor” of production which many current general struggles clash against, which now find themselves within the realm of reproduction.

Something is about to change from the above mentioned. But we must refrain from seeing this as a simple, linear and unilateral thing. Strikes and blockades punctually arrive, disappear and then reappear. Again and again as if the movement were seeking out its *raison d’être*. We must first note that that which is on the move and which seems to

contradict our position on exhaustion is based on sectoral demands. Thus at first glance, nothing seems to stop us from thinking that this course of action and the movement's bouncing back could be the disappearance of what has already appeared and has only characterized the first phase of the movement. In fact, that which has already appeared remains the base tendency, but does not calmly remain within the goal of crossing through this "glass floor," which is to say it goes beyond the formation of the conditions of its existence.

In this crossing over, the "we demand nothing" of the outbreaks, the collectives in struggle and the "Nuits debout" leave behind their abstract generalization. Of course within this abstract generality were brought up the unemployed, the undocumented, the non-white banlieues, women, work conditions, housing, the invasion of commodities into our lives, sexual orientation, peasant agriculture, etc. But none of these "causes," no matter how real, did not have in their finitude any existence of their own, none were there as a moment of a totality that is to come, as a moment which should already usher in a final convergence, either virtually or potentially, if only they were to be included. Notions of citizenship, of being "the people," of "being together" saturated their discourse. Who was the enemy? The police: held as the enemy because they prevented all of this to function on its own as everyone had the desire for. "Everyone hates the police," but it serves no purpose to hate the billy-club if you do not hate the power that wields it. Generally this point of view was in the end a point of view from nowhere, without opponents, without enemies or either this point of view just superbly ignored them. But the point of view from nowhere does not necessarily express a situation that does not exist.

According to a survey done by the sociologists with EHESS (as an indicative consideration), the social composition of the "Nuits debout" is more diverse than as first described: there are included the unemployed, banlieue residents, workers. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the participants

are college graduates (as noted in the survey and by our own visit to one of the gatherings). If all this does not interfere with your being unemployed, then it definitely defines the particular social profile from which the language of general society, of “the common,” of justice and of injustice comes from. The middle-class college graduate, finding themselves in community life, is an incarnation of the abstract norm of republican citizenship. The “Nuits debout” know very well how to speak of themselves and were photogenic in the media, who finally were able to find their own kind there. The phrase “we demand nothing” was an abstract generality appearing and sometimes acting as a recuperator of the socially particular effervescence. According to the same survey, 2/3 of the Parisian participants in “Nuit debout” had not participated in any demonstration against the Labor Law.

Now the demands have returned and they play their role but it is an ambivalent role. That’s where we are right now. The direction of the movement and its passage to another level form a rebound, but this is not necessarily a contradiction to the exhaustion-disappearance of that which could have appeared as a fundamental determination of its first phase; which could also be described as the non-demand-based abstract generality with all its ideological limitations since this generality was itself ideology. The passing over of this abstract generality passes through the particular and currently the particular takes the form of demands. But we must refrain from thinking that the whole must exist in every part, that the whole cannot exist without being at the heart of every situation where it plays out not in terms of power but in terms of acts. We will pass from abstract generality to an “expressive totality,” the entirety of the capitalist mode of production expresses itself in a hierarchical structure with fundamental determinations and dominating powers, which its determinations designate (it is not an impossibility that theoretical reflection, even the very abstract, could be very useful). It is by way of

this that appears the crossing over of the glass floor as a determinant for no matter which general movement of struggles.

Class belonging as an external constraint is a situation, an upsurge within class struggle, in which the particular and the demand are present and play their role. This situation and upsurge are a result of certain forces and they depend on the relation between the practice of the proletariat and the practice of the State and the dominant class. So that this practice takes form, the practice of demands, the crossing of the glass floor, must already be used, so that the demand becomes a series of fault lines. These fault lines can be seen by the fearless way some throw themselves into minoritarian actions, with blockades that go beyond their sector or a certain business, the will to strike a whole group of local businesses, the porosity between strongarm union marches and the “informal marches,” the non-marginalization of demos and outbreaks by the so-called “thugs” [casseurs] and also with the cascading relation which unites all the levels of struggle. The entanglement of all demands end up calling into question The Demand.

Over this base, a “dialectic” between demands and the reactions of the dominant class play within the conditions of the appearance of the realization of class belonging as an external constraint (albeit fleeting). The mark of its appearance could become (beyond the strike and outbreaks) a set of practices modifying the use of public transportation, refineries, etc. with the goal of extending and modifying the struggles already in process; beyond all managerial worry and also beyond any particular demands. The seizure of the tools of struggle is not a form of ownership. This seizure is never an activity which institutionalizes itself, rather it falls into the communal definition of its use.

The practical possibilities of such a situation must highlight, in the crossing of the glass floor, the faults of demands and then a subsequent dive into those demands, because it is those demands which have kicked off the

movement once more. We must work towards, by strongly highlighting and underlining, the appearance of the absence of other faults within the demands made including the weak affirmation of autonomous women within the movement as well as the quasi-absence of any talk of the racialization of work in its daily existence under capital and its world. Highlighting the weakness or absence of these faults within demands made is to already highlight the current instability because convergence is not necessarily (unfortunately perhaps) the highroad which leads the proletariat to call into question its very existence and its contradiction within capital. In this sense, the call for or even the realization of a “general strike” could be as ambiguous as any convergence.

Inserting and highlighting the relation of these faults with the practices of the dominant class, we must wager on the intransigence of this class. Facing looming blockades and strikes at the refineries, Total S.A. (French multinational integrated oil and gas company) announced that they will revise their investments in France. Do I exist? Am I necessary as a worker of Total or not? – could be the thoughts of a worker at Fos-Sur-Mer. We must also equally wager also on the specific crisis of the French State which has become a menacing windbag. It also within the relation between the capitalist class and its State that the declaration that class belonging is an external constraint is found; which is to say this relation comprises situations where there is created a distancing between demand-based practices, a distancing where within the demand-based practice the agent who makes the demands is called into question because this agent only exists because of the class he sees before him. We pass from the illegitimacy of demands that is imposed to an illegitimacy which is claimed, where its very bearer begins to question who they are. It is not necessary, as the tendency already exists, that the practices which could construct this dynamic, become autonomous from their *raison d'être* (acting as a class, making demands) and try to forestall the dynamic they seek to construct.

As far as the “Nuits debout” are concerned, it is evident that the general change in the nature of the movement, which they are but a moment of, will either transform the “Nuits debout” or make them disappear. This will reveal more clearly how heterogeneous the participants are in requiring them to reformulate their position vis-a-vis political, democracy and citizen-based solutions. Either this will be their end or either their social composition will change. The present ambivalence of practical demands must become their central prerogative. Or rather, either their assemblies will completely fall into pure self-referential ideology of a Community in construction (along with the mirage of digital devices securing their virtual existence) under the cover of the ideological expansion of the “common”; or either they will enter the political reconstruction à la Podemos (which is not really foreseeable in France; Syriza is another thing altogether).

To finish we’ll go back to the beginning, as we must to the question at the introduction: the crossing of the glass floor which was the way the first part of the movement constituted itself to find its own conditions for existence, to no longer “float,” could also very well be its burial. The exhaustion of that which constituted its first phase could also halt its reaching a higher level. Nothing is linear or unilateral, but these are the issues and positions we must define.

The Present Moment

2010

ROLAND SIMON, FROM SIC 1

In the course of revolutionary struggle, the abolition of the state, of exchange, of the division of labour, of all forms of property, the extension of the situation where everything is freely available as the unification of human activity – in a word, the abolition of classes – are ‘measures’ that abolish capital, imposed by the very necessities of struggle against the capitalist class. The revolution is communisation; it does not have communism as a project and result, but as its very content.

Communisation and communism are things of the future, but it is in the present that we must speak about them. Communisation is prefigured in the present struggles every time the proletariat comes up against its own existence as a class, in its action as a class against capital – i.e. within the relation of exploitation and in the very course of those struggles. Communisation is prefigured every time the very existence of the proletariat is produced as something alien to it, as an objective constraint which is externalised in the very existence of capital, and which it confronts in its struggles as a class. It is the class struggle which, within itself, has become the problem. It is the content of the revolution to come that these struggles prefigure – in this cycle of struggles – each time that the very fact of acting as a class appears as an external constraint, a limit to overcome.

The essential features of a theory of communisation are conjugated in the present. Without this, to speak of communisation is a hollow exercise of political fiction. To conceive of the revolution as communisation flows from the current understanding of the fact of struggling as a class as a limit of class struggle. This is the threshold which must be crossed. To

cross this threshold is the only way of talking about the revolution as communisation in a way which relates to current struggles.

THE NEW CENTRALITY OF THE WAGE DEMAND: THE DEMAND FOR THE WAGE IS ILLEGITIMATE

With the crisis of the ‘Fordist regime of accumulation’ and its overcoming in the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production during the 1970s and 80s, wage demands progressively become illegitimate and even ‘outside the system’ in the relation between capital and proletariat.⁷¹ In addition

71 The restructuring which accompanied the crisis from the end of the 1960s to the beginning of the 1980s was a workers’ defeat, the defeat of workers’ identity, whatever the social and political forms of its existence (from Communist Parties to autonomy; from the Socialist State to the workers’ councils). This identity rested entirely on the contradiction which developed in the first phase of real subsumption (from the 1920s to the 1960s) between on the one hand the creation and development of labour-power employed by capital in a more and more collective and social way, and on the other the forms of appropriation by capital of this labour-power in the immediate production process, and in the process of reproduction. This is the conflictual situation which developed as workers’ identity — an identity which found its distinction and its immediate modalities of recognition (its confirmation) in the ‘large factory’, in the dichotomy between employment and unemployment, work and training, in the submission of the labour process to the collectivity of workers, in the link between wages, growth and productivity on a national level, in the institutional representations that all this implied, as much in the factory as at the level of the state: in the delimitation of accumulation within a national area. The extraction of relative surplus-value, at the level of the immediate production process just as much as at the level of the reproduction of

to being an essentially conflictual issue, 'the distribution of wealth' has the whole, is the principle of development and mutation of real subsumption. At both these levels, during the first phase of real subsumption, obstacles appeared to the pursuit of accumulation as it had been structured by the extraction of relative surplus-value itself.

At issue here was everything that had become an impediment to the fluidity of the self-presupposition of capital. We find on one hand all the separations, defences, specifications that are erected in opposition to the decline in value of labour-power, those that prevent the whole working class in the continuity of its existence, of its reproduction and expansion, from having to confront capital as a whole as such on a global scale. On the other hand we find all the constraints of circulation, turnover, accumulation, which impede the transformation of the surplus product into surplus-value and additional capital.

With the restructuring that was completed in the 1980s, the production of surplus-value and the reproduction of the conditions of this production coincided. Here we mean the articulation between the integration of the reproduction of labour-power on the one hand, and the transformation of surplus-value into additional capital and ultimately the increase of relative surplus-value in the immediate production process, on the other, all of which had become impediments to valorisation on the basis of relative surplus-value.

This non-coincidence between production and reproduction was the basis of the formation and confirmation of a workers' identity in the reproduction of capital; it was the existence of a hiatus between the production of surplus-value and the reproduction of the social relation, a hiatus which allowed the competition between two hegemonies, two rival modes of managing and controlling reproduction. It was the very substance of the workers' movement.

become taboo.

The attack on wages is not a linear constant of capitalism, continually getting worse: if capital is value in process and the exploitation of labour its very definition, the relation between capital and labour, in the whole process of reproduction, is always historically specific. In the previous phase of the capitalist mode of production, until the end of the 1960s, exploitation produced its own conditions of realisation — a time in which these conditions were optimal from the point of view of the valorisation of capital itself. That included everything that made the reproduction of the proletariat a determinant of the reproduction of capital itself: public services, the delimitation of accumulation within national areas, creeping inflation ‘erasing’ the indexing of wages, the ‘sharing of productivity gains’. From all this flowed the legitimate construction and recognition of the proletariat in the capitalist mode of production as a national interlocutor (both socially and politically), from the point of view of capital. It was workers’ identity which modulated from social democracy to councilism.

In restructured capitalism (whose crisis we are now experiencing), the reproduction of labour power was subjected to a double decoupling. On the one hand a decoupling between the valorisation of capital and the

In its three definitive determinations (the labour-process, the integration of the reproduction of labour-power, and relations between capitals on the basis of the equalisation of the rate of profit), the extraction of relative surplus-value implies the coincidence between production and reproduction and as a corollary the coalescence between the constitution and the reproduction of the proletariat as a class on the one hand and on the other its contradiction with capital. The contradiction between the proletariat and capital now has as its essential content its own renewal, which produces the identity between the constitution of the proletariat as a class and its contradiction with capital. In its contradiction with capital which defines it as a class, the proletariat brings itself into question.

reproduction of labour power and, on the other, a decoupling between consumption and the wage as income.

The first decoupling appears, first of all, as a geographical zoning of the capitalist mode of production: capitalist hypercentres grouping together the higher functions in the hierarchy of business organisation (finance, high technology, research centres, etc.); secondary zones with activities requiring intermediate technologies, encompassing logistics and commercial distribution, ill-defined zones with peripheral areas devoted to assembly activities, often outsourced; lastly, crisis zones and ‘social dustbins’ in which a whole informal economy, involving legal or illegal products, prospers. Although the valorisation of capital is unified across this zoning, the same is not true for the reproduction of labour power. Reproduction occurs in different ways in each of these zones. In the first world: high-wage strata where social risks are privatised intermesh with fractions of the labour force where certain aspects of Fordism have been preserved and others, increasingly numerous, subjected to a new ‘compromise’ whose content is the total purchase of labour-power⁷².

72 The capitalist class purchases for its overall use a certain sum of productive labour — through the intermediary of the state or public-private institutions, and increasingly of the private institutions whose function this is — and supplements its value according to the use made of it by this or that capitalist; the wage is no longer the payment for an individual labour-power on its own basis, but an aliquot part of the general value of available labour-power. Labour-power is thus presupposed as the property of capital, not only formally (the worker has always belonged to the whole capitalist class before selling himself to this or that capital), but really insofar as capital pays for its individual reproduction outside its immediate consumption which is merely accidental for each labour-power. Capital has not suddenly become philanthropic; in each worker it reproduces something which

In the second world: regulation through low wages, imposed by strong internal migratory pressure and highly precarious employment, islands of more or less stable international subcontracting, little or no guarantee for social risks and labour migrations. In the third world: humanitarian aid, all kinds of illicit trade, agricultural subsistence, regulation by all sorts of mafias and microscopic wars, but also by the revival of local and ethnic solidarities. This zoning is necessarily a *mise en abîme*: at every scale, from the neighbourhood to the world, this tripartite division is reproduced. The disjunction between the unified global valorisation of capital and the reproduction of labour power adequate for that valorisation is total. Between the two, the strictly equivalent reciprocal relationship between mass production and the modalities of reproduction of labour power, which used to define Fordism, has disappeared⁷³].

Zoning is a functional determination of capital: sustaining the expansion of global markets and the planetary extension of the available workforce,

belongs to it: the general productive power of labour which has become external to, and independent of, each worker — and indeed all the workers collectively. Conversely directly active labour-power, consumed productively, sees its necessary labour accruing to it as an individual fraction, defined not by the exclusive needs of its own reproduction, but as a fraction of general labour-power (representing the totality of necessary labour), a fraction of global necessary labour. There is a tendency towards the equalisation of incomes from work and those from inactivity.

73 The result of this global expansion of the capitalist mode of production through the mode of zoning has meant the proletarianisation of a vast majority of the world's population and simultaneously the production of large numbers of surplus proletarians (cf. the works of Mike Davis and the older ones of Serge Latouche).

despite the rupture between the two, outside any necessary relation between the two in any given predetermined area of reproduction.

The rupture of any necessary relation between the valorisation of capital and the reproduction of labour-power dissolves the regional or even national delimitation of areas of coherent reproduction. This disjunction produces an enmeshing of the different zones that is reproduced *ad infinitum*. The regions defined as 'intermediate' are the most interesting, because it is precisely there that the different elements are most intermingled. What we have here is the separation on the one hand of the reproduction and circulation of capital, and on the other hand of the reproduction and circulation of labour-power.

As for the second decoupling: increasing levels of indebtedness, stimulated by policies of low interest-rates, allow 'household' expenditure to grow more quickly than income. Competition, which only brings down prices on the condition of reducing wages, goes in tandem with the bondage of indebtedness, which has become as indispensable as wage-income in order to live.⁷⁴

It is the increase in the wealth of households, along with rising social inequality, which is the regulator, because it maintains the demand which validates the financial returns on capital. But the increase in this wealth is not possible without the expansion of credit, which raises asset prices. This is why credit excesses have repercussions in terms of the fluctuations in share prices. Tensions in regulation are manifested in financial crises, rather than in hikes in inflation. The stagnation in the

⁷⁴ 'Wage-earners have, to cap it all, the opportunity to be tyrannised at their own expense, since the savings instrumentalised by shareholder finance, which demands constant dividends, are actually their own.' (Le Monde Diplomatique, March 2008). About 1/3 of American wage-earners work for firms whose principal share-holder is a pension fund.

great majority of wage-incomes on the one hand, and the deflationary pressures on prices exerted by the competitiveness of emerging countries on the other, restrict the spread of localised inflationary pressures. [...] The viability of indebtedness becomes the focal point of this mode of regulation whose logic consists in displacing macro-economic risk onto households. [...] The whole of the financial system has adapted itself to the functioning of an economy in which household debt is the prime source of demand [or better, it had adapted itself — author's note]. (Aglietta and Berrebi, *Désordres dans le capitalisme mondial*, Éditions Odile Jacob, Paris 2007, pp. 56–57–60–62)

Such a system of relations between income and consumption is founded on huge wage-disparities, and can only reinforce them, but the poor have not been forgotten, as the subprime crisis and the worldwide increase in over-indebtedness have shown. In the succession of financial crises which for the last twenty years or so have regulated the current mode of valorisation of capital, the subprime crisis is the first to have taken as its point of departure not the financial assets that refer to capital investments, but household consumption, and more precisely that of the poorest households. In this respect it is a crisis specifically of the 'wage' relation of restructured capitalism, in which the continual decrease in the share of wages in the wealth produced, both in the core countries and in the emerging ones, is definitive. Among other things, this distinguishes this crisis from the one at the end of the 1960s, which was preceded by a rise in the share of wages.⁷⁵ Any 'exit from the crisis' implies a massive

75 When, in 1955, in France, the strikes of the metal-workers of Nantes and St Nazaire turned into riots, they culminated in favourable wage agreements. Employers gave their backing to the 'Renault Accords', which introduced significant wage rises, sliding scales for wages, a third week of annual paid leave, the introduction of private pension schemes, paid sick-leave and payment for bank holidays in order to stop

devalorisation of capital and an increase in the rate of exploitation, the latter translating into, among other things, the compression of the wage. In the present crisis, this compression of the wage was already structurally included in the phase which preceded it. It is for this reason that in order to designate specifically this crisis, we will speak of the crisis of the wage relation.

The wage is no longer an element of regulation of the whole of capitalism: the reproduction of labour-power is decoupled from the valorisation of capital; income is decoupled from consumption by the massive financial implication of wage-income (debt and pension-funds are supplanting the direct and indirect wage and contributing to their exclusion from the mode of regulation); the segmentation of labour-power is tending to become functional for this regime of wages. Precarity is not only that part of employment that one can *stricto sensu* qualify as 'precarious'. Now integrated into every branch, precarity is of course a 'threat' to all so-called 'stable' jobs. Stable jobs are taking on characteristics of precarity, primarily with flexibility, mobility, constant availability, and subcontracting which makes even the 'stable' jobs at small and medium-sized companies insecure, and the project-centric character of some work in large companies. The list of symptoms of the contagion of precarity affecting formally stable jobs is long.

The wage demand is currently characterised by a dynamic that wasn't previously possible. It is an internal dynamic which comes about as a result of the whole relation between proletariat and capital in the capitalist mode of production such as it has emerged from the restructuring and such as it is now going into crisis. The meaning of the wage demand has changed. At the high point of the previous cycle of struggles, the operaists saw in the wage demand the self-valorisation of the workers and the refusal of work as a triumph of 'social labour'. This content was

the movement from spreading (above all in the Parisian region).

nothing but the importance of labour and of the working class, such as it was defined and confirmed in this first phase of real subsumption, being turned back against capital (see the appendix for a note on the formal and real subsumption of labour under capital [available online, ed. note]). It wasn't only a matter of full employment, but it was the location that the reproduction of capital had defined for labour in its own reproduction, which defined the capacity for the proletariat to make this location into a weapon against capital.

Of course, the division of the working day into necessary and surplus labour is still definitive of the class struggle. But in the form that the struggle over this division takes today, it is paradoxically in the proletariat's definition, to the very depth of its being—as a class of this mode of production, and nothing else—that it becomes apparent in practice that the proletariat's existence as a class is the limit of its own struggle as a class. This is currently the central character of the wage demand in class struggle. In the most trivial course of the wage demand, the proletariat sees its own existence as a class objectify itself as something which is alien to it to the extent that the capitalist relation itself places it in its heart as something alien.

Proletarians find in capital nothing other than the divisions of wage-labour and exchange — i.e. in their relation to themselves, and no organisational or political form, no demand, can any longer overcome this division.⁷⁶ In the previous period in the very dynamic of capitalist

76 The relation of the proletariat to itself is never an 'immediate self-consciousness', a self-relation, but always a relation to capital; for the proletariat this is its self-relation. Even 'workers' identity' is a certain relation of the proletariat to capital as a self-relation. The specificity of the current phase of the relation of exploitation resides in the fact that the relation of the proletariat to capital no longer carries within it a relationship of the proletariat to itself confirming it in an identity for itself vis-à-vis capital. One might say that currently the highest form

development, the demand presented itself as a transaction adequate to the transformations of the relation of exploitation: its legitimacy was founded on the necessary link between the transformations of the process of production and the conditions of reproduction. The restructuring, which determines the form of the relation in the present cycle of struggles, has swept aside this necessity, depriving the demand of the legitimacy conferred upon it by the preceding cycle of struggles. The demand no longer forms a relation to capital comprising the proletariat's capacity to find within itself its own basis, its own constitution, its own reality, on the basis of a workers' identity which the reproduction of capital, in its historical modalities, served to confirm. The proletariat recognises capital as its *raison d'être*, its own existence over against itself, and as the only necessity of its own existence. From this moment on, the proletariat sees its existence as a class objectify itself in the reproduction of capital as something which is alien to it and which it is led to call into question.

There is now a structural intertwining between, on the one hand, being in contradiction with capital, which includes the demand and, on the other, the class' calling itself into question as being nothing other than its relation to capital. For the capitalist class, the demand-based strike is no longer legitimate as was the case in the internally conflictual and largely nationally delimited process of accumulation which was dubbed 'Fordist'.

This intertwining between making demands and calling oneself into question as proletarians, which is characteristic of this cycle of struggles, can be summarised as follows: class belonging forms the general limit of the struggles of this cycle. This intertwining is even to be found specifically in the demand *par excellence*: the wage demand. Here, the demand does not

of the 'class for itself' is the riot, i.e. the recognition, through attacking them, of all the conditions of existence and reproduction of the proletariat as being an exteriority in capital. The proletariat no longer recognises itself as a class other than as existing totally outside itself.

disappear, it is rather in itself that its change of meaning should be sought. With the current crisis, the wage demand has become a contradictory system: the wage is both essential and decoupled; it is squeezed as income and yet central as consumption and financial circulation. The wage demand is unified as the action of a global social labour-force, which is at the same time segmented and divided into zones in this very unification.

THE CRISIS

The current crisis must be historically and specifically characterised in its singularity as a crisis of the wage relation. It's always possible to relate all crises back to the falling rate of profit and to consider the form in which they appear as mere phenomenal forms that may be left to the side in the fundamental analysis for lack of ideas about what to do about them. This would be to forget that the forms in which they appear are the whole of reality and that the essence (the falling rate of profit) is a concept, the concrete in thought. The very concept of crisis is unthinkable without the forms in which it appears; it is produced in those forms rather than being a 'true reality' hidden behind them.

The current crisis broke out because proletarians could no longer repay their loans. It broke out on the very basis of the wage relation which gave rise to the financialisation of the capitalist economy: wage cuts as a requirement for 'value creation' and global competition within the work force. The exploitation of the proletariat on a global scale is the hidden face and the condition for the valorisation and reproduction of this capital, which tends toward an absolute degree of abstraction. What has changed in the current period is the scale of the field within which this pressure was exerted: the benchmark price for all commodities, including labour-power, has become the minimum world price. This implies a drastic reduction or even disappearance of the admissible profit rate differentials, through the discipline imposed by financial capital which conditions productive

capital. The search for maximum profit is not new, but, with the end of the parallelism between rising wages and increasing productivity, wage norms have changed, as has the area of equalisation within which this pressure for profit maximisation is exerted: the financialisation of capital is above all workers' defeat by capital.⁷⁷ This wage reduction is necessary not only because attempts to maximize surplus labour are a general structural necessity (and always a historically specific one) of the capitalist mode of production, but in addition specifically because it is the functional condition, in financialised capital, for the non-propagation of inflationist tensions in a system of accumulation based on a constant supply of liquidity. This functional necessity was what reappeared, but in a negative fashion, within the historical mode of capital accumulation with the detonation of the subprime crisis. Now the wage relation is at the core of the current crisis. The current crisis is the beginning of the phase of reversal of the determinations and dynamic of capitalism as it emerged from the restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s. What was precisely the system's dynamic – the interpenetration between the financialisation of productive capital and the double decoupling of the wage — is now in the process of exploding, and turning into barriers to and vectors of the tendential fall in the rate of profit.

All the contradictions really take shape after 2005, leading to the detonation of the current crisis. First the growth of consumption, made possible by the growth of debt whilst wages stagnate or grow only marginally; then the growth in fixed investment of companies made possible by the slightly increasing rate of profit after 2002, itself based on the reduction of wages.⁷⁸ At the same time there is over-accumulation of capital and

⁷⁷ This financialisation was not the implementation of a plan, rather it occurred incrementally over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s.

⁷⁸ That is to say after the crisis of 1997 to 2001 which led to

over-production of commodities: over-accumulation because of under-consumption; under-consumption because of over-accumulation.

Proletarians never consume a portion of surplus value, as is assumed by theories of under-consumption that oppose the decline or stagnation in wages to the realisation of the increased surplus-value which results from it. The secret resides in the fact that too much revenue is transformed into constant capital, resulting in massive augmentation of production, while the rate of profit tends to fall as does the consumption power of society. Workers' consumption is blocked in relation to increased production because too much revenue has been transformed into constant capital (in the final analysis, the production of means of production can only be in the service of consumption); too much revenue has been transformed into constant capital because the aim of capitalist production is the maximum production of surplus value and the relative reduction of workers' consumption. This reduction then blocks the reproduction of capital. The transformation of an accrued surplus value into additional capital is simultaneously blocked, on the one hand by the limited possibilities for any further increase in exploitation, and on the other hand, by the extent to which workers' consumption has already been reduced. Further reductions could only be pursued by the acceleration of the transformation of revenue into capital.

It is a crisis of the wage relation, both as the capacity for the valorisation of capital and the capacity for the reproduction of the working class. In order not to leave aside the forms of appearance and in order to specifically designate the current crisis, it is necessary to unify the theory of crisis.⁷⁹

some depreciation of capital but not a reduction of excess capacity in Asian factories.

79 As far as the theory of crisis is concerned, Marxism split into two broad tendencies. The first of these explains crises in terms of workers' underconsumption and the resulting difficulties in the realisa-

We are faced with a crisis in which the identity of over-accumulation and under-consumption is affirmed, a crisis of the wage relation and of the reciprocal implication between labour and capital; a crisis in which the proletariat finds itself, within and against the capitalist mode of production, confronted by its own existence and action as a class as a limit to be overcome.

Without using the concept of the 'final crisis of capitalism', which is theoretically meaningless, we can still ask ourselves about the nature of this crisis: are we faced with the final crisis of this phase of accumulation? The simple answer to this question is: no.

What we have is a structural crisis of this phase of accumulation, one which we qualify specifically as a crisis of the wage relation. But this structural crisis paves the way for a crisis of money creation (i.e. a crisis of the capitalist mode of production exhibiting the specific forms of the phase of accumulation characterised by the financialisation of valorisation and the structural monetary modifications initiated in 1971) which, in the crisis of the wage relation in which it is inscribed, conserves and supersedes the latter by becoming a crisis of value. The latter is a crisis of human activity as commensurable.

tion of surplus-value. The second is founded upon the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and thus on the paucity of surplus-value in relation to the accumulation of capital, whose variable part decreases relative to its constant part; the crisis is one of overaccumulation relative to the possibilities for the valorisation of the accumulated capital. In Marx's texts we can find justification for both theses, but also, most importantly, we can see how both are mutually imbricated there as well. It is only on the basis of the second of these crisis theories that both can be unified. In this sense, it is not properly speaking a matter of 'unification', but rather the total development of the second, taken to its conclusion.

The crisis of the creation of money and that of the wage relation develop reciprocally, each within the other. In the capitalist mode of production, value is only the generalised social form of products in exchange because it is value in process, because it never disappears thanks to the exchange with labour-power. The crisis of money creation — the crisis of money as an autonomised form of value — is not only a crisis of circulation, of exchange, but a crisis of the exchange of commodities insofar as these commodities are capital — i.e. bearers of surplus value, of surplus labour time. A crisis of money creation which occurs historically as a crisis of the wage relation, or a crisis of the wage relation as a monetary crisis, is a crisis of value as capital or capital as value — i.e. to synthesise, a crisis of value in process: the only crisis of value. This conjunction was not inscribed for all eternity in the concept of capital, but occurs as a crisis of a specific phase of the capitalist mode of production. The unity, as crisis of value, of the crisis of money creation and the crisis of the wage relation incorporated by it, specifies the crisis of value as the concrete historic content of capital as contradiction in process. As is made clear in the following lengthy quotation, to be a contradiction in process is the very dynamic of capital, but this dynamic becomes, when grasped in the immediate characteristics of this crisis, the contradiction of the game which abolishes its own rule.

The exchange of living labour for objectified labour – i.e. the positing of social labour in the form of the contradiction of capital and wage labour – is the ultimate development of the value-relation and of production resting on value. Its presupposition is – and remains – the mass of direct labour time, the quantity of labour employed, as the determinant factor in the production of wealth. But to the degree that large industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labour time and on the amount of labour employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labour time, whose ‘powerful effectiveness’ is itself in turn out of all proportion to the direct labour time spent on their production,

but depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production. [...] No longer does the worker insert a modified natural thing [Naturgegenstand] as middle link between the object [Objekt] and himself; rather, he inserts the process of nature, transformed into an industrial process, as a means between himself and inorganic nature, mastering it. He steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor.

In this transformation, it is neither the direct human labour he himself performs, nor the time during which he works, but rather the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence as a social body – it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth.

The theft of alien labour time, on which the present wealth is based, appears a miserable foundation in face of this new one, created by large-scale industry itself.

As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. The surplus labour of the mass has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just as the non-labour of the few, for the development of the general powers of the human head. [...]

Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth. Hence it diminishes labour time in the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form; hence posits the superfluous in growing measure as a condition – question of life or death – for the necessary.

On the one side, then, it calls to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse, in order to

make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labour time employed on it. On the other side, it wants to use labour time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value. Forces of production and social relations – two different sides of the development of the social individual – appear to capital as mere means, and are merely means for it to produce on its limited foundation. In fact, however, they are the material conditions to blow this foundation sky-high.

(Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, London 1993, pp. 704–706.)

Capital as contradiction in process becomes the most general way to refer to the activity of the proletariat in this crisis, when the latter, in its struggles, produces its own class existence as the limit of its own activity as a class.

END OF THE OLD FORMALISATION OF LIMITS: THE END OF RADICAL DEMOCRATISM, THE END OF ACTIVISM

To act as a class is the very limit of class struggle: this is the most general determination of the present cycle of struggles in the relation between the proletariat and capital that resulted from the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production through the crisis of the 1970s. If this limit remains as such, its formalisations are subject to change or may even disappear. The explosive connection between the crisis of the wage relation and the illegitimacy of wage demands, which is at the core of the present moment, brings an end to any alternative, whether in the form of activism (the direct action movement) or radical democratism⁸⁰ (the two

80 What we understand by radical democratism is that this does not merely designate an ideology (around citizenship – ‘citizen-ism’ [citoyennisme]), but rather that it is a practice whose content consists in formalising and ratifying the limits of current struggles in their specific-

are historically linked). Another world is no longer possible here and now, neither on the basis of labour making capital conform to it, nor on the basis of the critique of labour as precondition for the abolition of capital. The current crisis, which is specifically a crisis of the wage relation, has made all that obsolete.

Let us take the example of the large 'anti-summit' mobilisations from the end of the 1990s to the beginning of the 2000s. Even if we cannot label all the tendencies operating there radical-democratic, they find themselves rubbing shoulders and even sometimes merging with each other. Examples of this are: the black blocks, Cobas and Tutte bianche in Genoa, in spite of serious frictions; the material support and infrastructure provided by the Genoa Social Forum; the arrangements made by Inpeg for the black

ity. That which constitutes the revolutionary dynamic of this cycle of struggles is also its intrinsic limit. The proletariat produces its entire being, its entire existence in the categories of capital, which is why it can also be the abolition of these; but radical democratism also formalises the whole of the limit of the struggles of this period: the ratification of the existence of the class within capital. This is all too real in the class struggle. For radical democratism, the critique of the capitalist mode of production is limited to the necessity for the proletariat to control the conditions of its existence. Thus this social movement finds, in its demands for a radicalisation of democracy, the most general form and content of its existence and its action (i.e. command, control). The proletarian is replaced by the citizen, the revolution by the alternative. The movement is vast: it ranges from forms which merely demand reform, a capitalism with a human face, to alternative perspectives which see themselves as representing a rupture with capitalism, all the while remaining within the problematic of command, of control, of management.

block in Prague, etc. This was only a transitory phase in the course of the current cycle of struggles.

A page has been turned:

* The end of the big anti-summit demos signifies the decline of activism while revealing at the same time their intimate connection with radical democratism.

* The success in these milieus of theories of a strategy of withdrawal (withdrawing back to remote bases, preparing and organising the mythical cuts in the flows of circulation) has confirmed their definitive swing towards alternativism.

* During the riots in Greece, these milieus met their intrinsic limit at the very moment when they could no longer be 'alternativists' and 'activists'.

* The violence, which can only increase, with which the crisis has begun to affect '16–25 year olds' is going to 'de-alternativise' the 'alternative milieu', for which the transition from 'posing questions relative to communism' to the struggle against capitalism is going to be reversed.

* More importantly: the general strike and the riots in Guadeloupe and Martinique, and the struggles against layoffs and for the wage everywhere, signify that the wage demand, i.e. exploitation in the most trivial sense, is the terrain on which develops the very process which leads the proletariat to call into question its own definition as a class.

Radical democratism formalised the limits of this cycle of struggles precisely by making capital the insurpassable horizon of labour. Alternativist activism autonomised the dynamic of this cycle, making the calling into question of the proletarian condition the premise, the condition, of a critique of capital. For both, 'another world was possible' in opposition to the present world.

Activism was the autonomisation of the dynamic of this cycle, with all the ideological reformulations that this implied. Two terms, inextricably linked in a class contradiction, were dissociated from each other: the class

acting as a class, and the class calling itself into question (i.e. finding the fact of acting as a class to be the limit of its own action as a class). The alternative substitutes itself for a contradictory process of the internal production of the overcoming. The putting into question of class belonging was something to be done in opposition to capital instead of being intrinsic to the contradiction that is exploitation. With both radical democratism and activism, another life was possible to the extent that the overcoming of capital was experienced, actually practised, as the other branch of an alternative whose first branch was capital.

Being a class without confirmation of itself in the reproduction of capital (which often gives rise to the paradigmatic situation of the young unemployed), being a class of this mode of production in contradiction with it, became autonomised into an essence, a mode of being. The limit inherent to this contradictory relation that defines the new cycle of struggles, i.e. the definition of the class exclusively in its contradictory relation with capital, was thus rejected as an exteriority.

In this new cycle of struggles resulting from the restructuring of capital, the contradiction between the proletariat and capital is situated at the level of the reproduction of the whole, hence at the level of the reciprocal reproduction of classes. This contradiction no longer comprises any confirmation of the proletariat for itself: it is the end of programmatism, of workers' identity and of what some others call the 'old workers' movement.' In this structure of the contradiction, the proletariat can put itself into question as a class in its contradiction with capital, which is in a reciprocal implication with it (i.e. exploitation). As a consequence, the abolition of capital is its own abolition, it is the abolition of all classes and the communisation of society.

However, this revolutionary (communist) dynamic of the current cycle implies immediately and intrinsically, as its own limit, that which renders its existence impossible. Within this capitalist relation itself, the

proletariat produces its entire existence as a class in capital, in a relation to capital that no longer confirms a relation of the proletariat to itself: workers' identity. Until the present explosive connection, this situation was making of the present cycle a constant tension between, on the one hand, the autonomisation of its dynamic, the calling into question by the proletariat of its own existence as a class, and, on the other hand, the recognition of its whole existence within the categories of capital. This tension was formalised by both activism and radical democratism – these two being hostile brothers but also vitally linked to one another, insofar as each of them, being an autonomisation of the elements of one and the same totality, could exist for itself only through a relation with its negative. No matter if in the first element we recognise the revolutionary dynamic of this cycle, and in the second element the formalisation of the limits of struggles as insurmountable barriers for them.

It was in activism that the dynamic of this cycle — the proletariat's calling into question of its own existence as a class — could pose itself and comprehend itself, but only by autonomising itself, with all the ideological reformulations that this implied. Class belonging was practically considered as already superseded, because in activist practice capital itself was already posed as alienation, facticity, symbol, exteriority. Rioters could call themselves 'proletarians' because being proletarian was nothing more than a sign, the name given to a self-defined practice as negating capital: 'we are proletarians because we are against capital'. Hence, all the positivity of activism in its necessary connection and confrontation with radical democratism.

The disappearance of alternative-leaning activism, and of activism in general, is a result of the development of immediate struggles in which the production of class belonging as an external constraint is the very fact of the struggles of the proletariat in its reciprocal implication with capital, rather than as autonomisation in opposition to capital.

THE CURRENT LIMITS: WE ARE NOTHING OUTSIDE THE WAGE RELATION; THE POLICE, DISCIPLINE

In restructured capitalism, the reproduction of labour power has been subject to a double decoupling (see above). This constitutes the wage demand as structurally illegitimate in this period of the capitalist mode of production and not only as counter to the maximum valorisation of capital. It is for this reason that the wage demand has become the terrain on which the process develops whereby class belonging is produced as an external constraint, to its very core: the wage relation by which the proletariat depends on capital for its physical and social existence.

The expression of this limit will from now on be twofold: we are nothing outside the wage relation, and that this struggle as a class, as its own limit, is the police.

As for the first expression, we have workers' violence against the decisions of the capitalist class — violence through which the working class demands that capital exist for it. If capital ever arbitrarily decides to no longer exist for the working class, then the latter is no longer anything. In order to exist, the working class demands the capitalist relation; it does this against capital. We are nothing outside the wage relation, this is the limit within class struggle of struggling as a class. For the working class, it will be a case of the most bitter defence of its conditions of existence, rather than staking a claim for their management or control. We could see the development of a very combative base unionism, but one which is very unstable and with an episodic existence, owing to the fact that it can neither develop itself nor stabilise itself in negotiations. Such a base unionism will be very close to all the different forms of self-management; like them, it will express and seek to formalise this limit of the class struggle which is the very fact of struggling as a class.

As for the second expression of the limit: it is also the police that tells us that we are nothing outside the wage relation. Of course it is a question

of the force which the relation of reciprocal implication between labour and capital boils down to in the last instance, but there is more to it than that precisely because this is a relation of reciprocal implication. The police is also how we are confronted by our own existence as a class as limit. If the main result of the production process is the reproduction of the encounter between proletariat and capital, it is not self-evident that from this encounter follows *ipso facto* the first moment of the exchange between capital and labour (the purchase and sale of labour power). Everywhere the disciplining of labour-power is the order of the day for the capitalist class as it confronts proletarians, who have once again become poor as proletarians. The reproduction of the encounter between labour power and capital becomes a matter of discipline.⁸¹

In this cycle of struggles, to act as a class has become, in the very activity of the proletariat as a class, the limit of this activity. Class belonging as an external constraint is the structure of the contradiction in which acting as a class is the very limit of the proletariat's activity, which is now what is at stake in the class struggle. What is now at stake in these struggles is that, for the proletariat, acting as a class is the limit of its action as a class — this is now an objective situation of class struggle — and that this limit is constructed as such in the struggles and becomes class belonging as an external constraint. This determines the level of conflict with capital, and gives rise to internal conflicts within the struggles themselves. This transformation is a determination of the current class contradiction, but it is in every case the particular practice of a struggle at a given moment and in given conditions.

THE RIFT: DEFINITION, EXAMPLES

81 On this second point, see the appendix to this text with the development offered by the Greek comrades from Blaumachen. [available online, ed. note]

If the proletariat, as one pole of the social relation, is no longer ever confirmed in its class situation by the reproduction of this relation, it follows that it cannot triumph by becoming the absolute pole of society. It is because the proletariat is not-capital, because it is the dissolution of all existing conditions (labour, exchange, division of labour, property) in these conditions and not in opposition to them, that the contradiction which is exploitation can take this form of class belonging as external constraint. Class belonging as external constraint is then in itself a content, that is to say, a practice. As not-capital, the proletariat finds here the content of its revolutionary action as communist measures: the abolition of property, of the division of labour, of exchange and of value. Communisation is nothing other than communist measures taken as simple measures of struggle by the proletariat against capital. These measures are the very reality of the production, in the struggle against capital, of the class belonging as external constraint.

It is now a fact that revolution is the abolition of all classes, insofar as the proletariat's acting as a class is, for itself, a limit. This abolition is not a goal that is proposed, a definition of revolution as a norm to be achieved, but a current content in what the class struggle is itself. This is the 'terrible step to take' in the theoretical understanding and practice of contemporary struggles. To produce class belonging as an external constraint is, for the proletariat, to enter into conflict with its previous situation; this is not 'liberation', nor is it 'autonomy'.

Self-organisation and its content — autonomy — cannot overthrow capitalist relations. When the proletariat is self-organised — and nowadays there are few struggles that are not self-organised, often in a more or less confrontational division of tasks with the unions — it breaks with its previous situation. This break is, however, in practice and above all in the ideology of autonomy, at best only its 'liberation', the reorganisation of what it is, of its activity on the basis of what it is in this society. Such a

reorganisation, long the stuff of dreams of the ideologues of autonomy, is always a disappointment to them. They, in common with the ideologues of democracy, justify its failures by the non-coincidence between reality and the concept. Autonomy is the autonomy of the proletariat and not the destruction of its previous situation. The autonomy of the proletariat is an oxymoron. If the proletariat remains self-organised, if it does not go beyond this stage, it can only be defeated because it has not gone beyond capitalist relations. The supersession of capitalist relations has nothing to do with an autonomous proletariat. Autonomy centers on the abolition of mediations; the real question lies in that which causes there to be mediation: being a class. It is the content of the revolution that we should be interested in, and that is precisely what the theory which considers self-organisation to be the revolution already in process cannot do, because this is precisely what self-organisation cannot be. This critique of self-organisation and autonomy is only of interest, only puts something at stake, if we are speaking of the class struggle as it is now, that is if, in the same movement, we specify the very fact of struggling as a class as the contradiction and limit of current struggles.

The proletariat finds the capacity to communise society in what it is itself, against capital, when it treats its own class nature as externalised in capital. With the production of class belonging as an external constraint, it is possible to understand the tipping point of the class struggle, i.e. its supersession as a produced supersession, on the basis of current struggles. In its struggle against capital, the class turns back against itself, i.e. it treats its own existence, everything that defines it in its relation to capital (and it is nothing but this relation) as the limit of its action. Proletarians do not liberate their 'true individuality' denied in capital; revolutionary practice is the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-transformation. It is this turning back of the class against

itself, and its theory, which are at present, the possibility of revolution as communisation.

The restructuring of the contradictory relation between the proletariat and capital means that the current cycle of struggles is fundamentally defined by the fact that the contradiction between classes occurs at the level of their respective reproduction, meaning that the proletariat finds and confronts its own constitution and existence as a class in its contradiction with capital. From this flows the disappearance of a worker's identity confirmed in the reproduction of capital — i.e. the end of the workers' movement and the concomitant bankruptcy of self-organisation and autonomy as a revolutionary perspective. Because the perspective of revolution is no longer a matter of the affirmation of the class, it can no longer be a matter of self-organisation.

For the proletariat, to act as a class is currently, on the one hand, to have no other horizon than capital and the categories of its reproduction, and on the other, for the same reason, it is to be in contradiction with, and to put into question, its own reproduction as a class. This conflict, this rift in the action of the proletariat, is the content of class struggle and what is at stake in it. From daily struggles to revolution, there can only be a rupture. But this rupture is prefigured in the daily course of class struggle each time that class belonging appears, within these struggles, as an external constraint which is objectified in capital, in the very course of the proletariat's activity as a class.

The proletariat's action as a class is characterised by a rift within itself through practices that externalise their own existence as class practices as a constraint which is objectified in the reproduction of capital. It is no longer possible to do anything more as a worker, while remaining a worker. This confrontation of the proletariat with its own constitution as a class is now the content of the class struggle and what is at stake in it is the putting into question by the proletariat of its own existence as a

class and of all classes. This is the reason why we can currently talk about communism, and why we can talk about it in the present.

Currently, the revolution is predicated on the supersession of a constitutive contradiction of the class struggle: for the proletariat, being a class is the obstacle that its struggle as a class must get beyond / abolish.

Class unity can no longer be formed on the basis of wage labour and the struggle over immediate demands as a prerequisite for the revolutionary activity of the proletariat. The unity of the proletariat can now only be the activity in which it abolishes itself by abolishing everything that divides it. It is a fraction of the proletariat which, in going beyond the demands-based character of its struggle, will take communising measures and will thus initiate the unification of the proletariat which will be the same process as the unification of humanity, i.e. its creation as the ensemble of social relations that individuals establish between themselves in their singularity.

From struggles over immediate demands to revolution, there can only be a rupture, a qualitative leap. But this rupture isn't a miracle. Neither is it the simple realisation on the part of the proletariat that there is nothing else to be done other than making the revolution, given the failure of everything else. 'Revolution is the only solution' is just as inept as talk of the revolutionary dynamic of demands-based struggles. This rupture is produced positively by the unfolding of the cycle of struggles which precedes it, and we can say that it still forms a part of it. This rupture is prefigured in the multiplication of rifts within the class struggle between, on the one hand, the calling into question by the proletariat of its own existence as a class in its contradiction with capital and, on the other hand, the reproduction of capital which is implied by the very fact of the proletariat's existence as a class. The concept of the rift designates the dynamic of this cycle of struggles, which exists in an empirically verifiable manner.

Two points encapsulate what is essential in the current cycle of struggles:

* The disappearance of a proletarian identity confirmed within the reproduction of capital corresponds to the end of the workers' movement and the concomitant exhaustion of self-organisation and of autonomy as a revolutionary perspective.

* With the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production, the contradiction between classes occurs at the level of their respective reproduction. In its contradiction with capital, the proletariat puts itself into question.

Demand-based struggles display characteristics which were unthinkable thirty years ago.

During the strikes of December 1995 in France, in the struggles of the undocumented immigrants, of the unemployed, of the Liverpool dockers, at Cellatex, Alstom, Lu, Marks and Spencer, in the Argentine social uprising, in the Algerian insurgency, in Greece, Guadeloupe, etc., a particular characteristic of the struggle appears, in the course of the struggle itself, as a limit. This limit is defined by the fact that the specific characteristic of the struggle (e.g. whether the struggle in question is in the public sector, or is over demands for jobs, or defending the means of labour, or fighting outsourcing or financial management, or involves factory occupations, self-organisation, etc.) which the movement comes up against, often in the internal tensions and confrontations during its decline, always comes down to the fact of being a class and of remaining so. Contrary to the previous period, it has become impossible to give a positive content to the fact of being a class, or to see these struggles as heralding the affirmation of the class.

Most often, these are not earthshaking declarations or 'radical' actions but rather all the proletariat's practices of flight from, or rejection of, its own condition. In current strikes over layoffs, workers often no longer demand to keep their jobs, but increasingly they fight for substantial redundancy payments instead. Against capital, labour has no future. These

struggles take an open character across workplaces, across companies and across sectors, sometimes in relation with the unemployed over a pool of jobs; they are open as to their aims, and the struggle is waged as much inside as outside the company.

It is already evident in the ‘suicidal’ struggles of Cellatex, in the strike at Vilvoorde and many others, that the proletariat is nothing if it is separated from capital and that it cannot remain this nothing. The fact that the proletariat demands to be reunited with capital does not close the abyss that the struggle opens up — the abyss being the proletariat’s recognition and refusal of itself. It’s the de-essentialisation of labour which becomes the very activity of the proletariat: both tragically, in its struggles without immediate perspectives (i.e. its suicidal struggles) and self-destructive activities, and as demand for this de-essentialisation, as in the struggles of the unemployed and the precarious in the winter of 1998 in France.

Unemployment is no longer clearly separated from employment. The boundaries have all been blurred by the segmentation of the labour force — flexibility, subcontracting, mobility, part-time working, training, internships and ‘off the books’ work. The end of the dichotomy between work and unemployment is an essential moment of the fluidity of the reproduction of the encounter between labour and capital which poses the contradiction between classes at the level of their reproduction. With the struggles of the unemployed and precarious it has become almost self-evident that the struggle of the proletariat no longer comprises any element of self-confirmation. This is not due to unemployment in itself, but to the way it is inscribed in the relation of exploitation.

In the French movement of 1998, and more generally in the struggles of the unemployed in this cycle of struggles, it is the definition given by the unemployed themselves which sees itself as the starting point for the reformulation of waged employment. The need for capital to measure everything in labour time and to posit the exploitation of labour as a

matter of life or death for it is simultaneously the de-essentialisation of living labour relative to the social forces that capital concentrates in itself. This contradiction inherent in capitalist accumulation, which is a contradiction in capital in process, takes the very particular form of the definition of the class vis-à-vis capital; unemployment claims for itself the status of being the starting-point for such a definition. In the struggles of the unemployed and precarious, the struggle of the proletariat against capital makes this contradiction its own, and champions it. The same thing occurs when workers who have been sacked don't demand jobs but severance pay instead.

Moreover, when it becomes evident that autonomy and self-organisation are no longer the perspective of anything (as in the Italian transport strikes or those at the Fiat plant in Melfi), this is the point at which the dynamic of this cycle of struggles is constituted and the ground is prepared for the supersession of the demands-based struggle on its own basis. The proletariat is faced with its own definition as a class which becomes autonomous in relation to it, which becomes alien to it.

From December 2002 to January 2003, the ACT strike in Angers (ACT is a computer equipment subsidiary of Bull) was led concurrently by a trade-union alliance and a strike committee which was 'broadly open and relatively grass-roots.' Three production lines were temporarily restarted, which did not prevent the finished products from being burnt, however. It is interesting to take another look at the chronology of events. The factory was occupied following the announcement on the 20th of December of the company's definitive receivership 'after multiple manoeuvrings and prevarications.' The factory was occupied but nobody knows to what end. On the 10th of January the strike committee agreed to take on the production of electronic components for an Italian equipment manufacturer. On the 22nd of January, 200 components were delivered; on the 23rd the occupants burned the components that were in inventory;

on the 24th, the occupiers were unceremoniously evicted. In the same period, the Moulinex employees who had been made redundant set fire to a factory building, thus inscribing themselves in the dynamic of this cycle of struggles, which makes the existence of the proletariat as a class the limit of its class action. Similarly, in 2006, in Savar, 50 km north of Dhaka, Bangladesh, two factories were torched and a hundred others ransacked after workers had not been paid for three months. In Algeria, minor wage demands turn into riots, forms of representation are dismissed without new ones being formed, and it is the entirety of the living conditions and reproduction of the proletariat which come into play beyond the demands made by the immediate protagonists of the strike.

In China and India, there is no prospect of the formation of a vast workers' movement from the proliferation of various types of demands-based action affecting all aspects of life and the reproduction of the working class. These demands-based actions often turn paradoxically on the destruction of the conditions of labour. Large concentrations of workers in India and China are part of a global segmentation of the labour force. They can neither be regarded as a renaissance elsewhere of what has disappeared in 'the West' in terms of their global definition, nor in terms of their own inscription in the national context. It was a social system of existence and reproduction that defined working class identity and was expressed in the workers' movement, and not the mere existence of quantitative material characteristics.⁸²

82 For China and India to manage to constitute themselves as their own internal market would depend on a veritable revolution in the countryside (i.e. the privatisation of land in China and the disappearance of small holdings and tenant farming in India) but also and above all on a reconfiguration of the global cycle of capital, supplanting the present globalisation (i.e. this would mean a renationalisation superseding / preserving globalisation, and a definancialisation of

In the case of Argentina, people self-organise as the unemployed of Mosconi, as the workers of Brukman, as slum-residents etc., but in this sort of self-organisation they immediately come up against what they are as an obstacle, which, in the struggle, becomes that which has to be overcome, and which is seen as such in the practical modalities of these self-organised movements. The proletariat cannot find within itself the capacity to create other inter-individual relations without overturning and negating what it is itself in this society, i.e. without entering into contradiction with autonomy and its dynamic. In Argentina it was the determinations of the proletariat as a class of this society (i.e. property, exchange, the division of labour, the relation between men and women etc.) which were effectively shaken by the way productive activities were undertaken, that is, in the actual modalities of their realisation. It is thus that the revolution as communisation becomes credible.

In addition, that self-organisation is a general limit to be superseded becomes apparent in conflicts between the self-organised sectors. It becomes apparent in these conflicts that workers, in defending their current situation, remain within the categories of capitalist mode of production that define them. Unification is impossible without being precisely the abolition of self-organisation, i.e. unification implies that the unemployed worker, the Zanon worker, the squatter can no longer remain the unemployed worker, the Zanon worker, the squatter. Either there is unification, in which case there is the abolition of the very thing which is self-organisable, or there is self-organisation, in which case unification is a dream which is lost in the conflicts which derive from the diversity of situations.

productive capital). That is to say that this hypothesis is beyond our current conceptual range because it is beyond this cycle of struggles: it presupposes the revolution which has already been defeated; the current cycle bears this defeat within it, as a restructuring of the capitalist mode of production which occurred in and through this defeat.

In defending its immediate interests, the proletariat is led to abolish itself because its activity in the 'occupied factory' can no longer remain enclosed in the 'occupied factory', nor in the juxtaposition, coordination and unity of the 'occupied factories', nor indeed in the unification of everything which is self-organisable.

In France in November 2005, in the banlieues, the rioters didn't demand anything. The content of the November revolt was the refusal of the causes of the revolt: the rioters attacked their own condition, they made everything that produces and defines them their target. That this was the case is in no way down to an imagined radicalism intrinsic to the 'hooligans of the banlieues'. It is to be explained rather by the conjunction of two current factors: on the one hand, the particular situation of this fraction of the proletariat; on the other, the fact that, in general, the demand is not what it once was. Rioters revealed and attacked the proletarian situation now: the worldwide precarisation of the workforce. In doing so they immediately made obsolete, in the very moment in which such a demand could have been articulated, any desire to be an 'ordinary proletarian'.

This interconnectedness, characteristic of this cycle of struggles, between the demands made by proletarians and the way in which they put themselves in question as proletarians, which can be synthesised as class-belonging as the general limit of this cycle, reached the level of paroxysm in the November riots as a result of the particularity of their participants. The demand disappeared.

Three months later, in spring 2006, during the struggle against the CPE, everyone knew what could emerge from the withdrawal of the CPE: at best, if the trade unionist projects had triumphed, a flexicurity à la française. Who wanted that? Certainly not the majority of the students, precarious workers and high school students who were on the streets. As a demands-based movement, this would nonetheless have been the only result. A result which the movement could not admit to itself. As a movement of

demands, the student-movement could only understand itself by becoming the general movement of the precarious, but then either it would have self-destructed in its specificity, or it would have inevitably been forced to collide more or less violently with all those who in the November riots had shown that they refused to be used as mere foot-soldiers. To achieve the demand through its expansion would in effect be to sabotage it. What credibility was there in a link-up with the November rioters on the basis of a permanent contract (CDI) for all? On the one hand, this link-up was objectively inscribed in the genetic code of the movement; on the other hand, this very necessity of this link-up induced an internal love-hate dynamic, just as objective, within the movement. The struggle against the CPE was a movement of demands, the satisfaction of which would have been unacceptable to itself as a movement of demands.

The riots in Greece and the general strike in Guadeloupe are the most recent events which characterise this cycle of struggles.

In the Greek riots, the proletariat didn't demand anything, and didn't consider itself opposed to capital as the foundation of any alternative. Quite simply, through riots that produced class-belonging as an external constraint and the relation of exploitation as pure and simple coercion, the proletariat no longer wants to be what it is.

These riots were a movement of the class rather than a mere agitation by activists (which would itself in any case be a movement of the class), but it wasn't a struggle in what is the very matrix of classes: production. It is in this way that these riots were able to make the key achievement of producing and targeting class belonging as a constraint, but they could only reach this point by confronting this glass floor of production as their limit. And the ways in which this movement produced this external constraint (the aims, the unfolding of the riots, the composition of the rioters, etc.) was intrinsically defined by this limit. This constituted the ambivalence of this movement.

Students without a future, young immigrants, precarious workers, these are all proletarians who live every day the reproduction of capitalist social relations as coercion. Coercion is included in this reproduction because they are proletarians, but they experience it every day as separated and aleatory (accidental and non-necessary) in relation to production itself. They struggle at the same time in this moment of coercion as separated, and only conceive of and experience this separation as a lack in their own struggle against this mode of production.

It is in this way that this movement produced class belonging as an external constraint, but only in this way. It is in this way that it locates itself at the level of this cycle of struggles and is one of its determining historical moments. Attacking institutions and the forms of social reproduction, taken in themselves, was on the one hand what constituted the movement, and what constituted its force, but on the other hand, this was also the expression of its limits.

In Greece it was in this configuration and in the ambiguity that it contained that, for the proletarians in struggle, their class belonging, i.e. their own definition as a class in their relation to capital, was produced as, and appeared as, an external constraint. In their own practice and in their struggle, they called themselves into question as proletarians, but only by separating the moments and the instances of social reproduction in their attacks and their aims. Reproduction and production of capital remained foreign to each other.

Currently, the resolution depends on the overcoming of a constitutive contradiction of class struggle: class-being is for the proletariat the obstacle that its struggle as a class must go beyond / abolish. The riots in Greece posited this obstacle, formalised the contradiction, and didn't go any further. This was their limit, but the contradiction is now posed practically for this cycle of struggles in restructured capitalism and in its crisis.

In Guadeloupe, the importance of unemployment, and of the part of the population that lives from benefits or from an underground economy, means that wage-demands are a contradiction in terms. This contradiction structured the course of events between, on the one hand, the LKP, which was centered on permanent workers (essentially in public services) but which attempted to hold the terms of this contradiction together through the multiplication and the infinite diversity of demands, and, on the other, the absurdity of central wage-demands for the majority of people on the barricades, in the looting, and in the attacks on public buildings. The demand was destabilised in the very course of the struggle. It was contested, as was its form of organisation, but the specific forms of exploitation of the entire population, inherited from its colonial history, were able to prevent this contradiction from breaking out more violently at the heart of the movement (it is important to note that the only death was that of a trade-unionist killed on a barricade). From this point of view, the production of class belonging as an external constraint was more a sort of schizophrenia than something genuinely produced in the course of struggle, more a sociological phenomenon than something at stake in the struggle. No conflictual recomposition of the class around unemployed and precarious workers arose — rather a parallel existence between waged and unemployed workers in the movement, at the head of which, the LKP placed itself, for better or for worse. This didn't prevent wage-demands from conflicting globally with the composition of the demonstrators and finding their limit there.

The wage-demand advanced by the fraction of more or less permanent employees found its limit in the mass of the unemployed and claimants who were swept along in the movement. But this wasn't simply an external limit: the two groupings weren't strangers who found themselves 'side by side' by accident. They were brought together by the total purchase of labour-power, in which the total labour-power is always already bought,

whatever its individual (i.e. by fractions) or collective consumption, by capital in general for an income in which wages and other forms of incomes are equalised. Wage-demands are totally modified when the form of free contract is obsolete. Workers can no longer, by means of a liberation of labour, break the chain which links together the terms of the contradictory but reciprocal implication between surplus and necessary labour.

The illegitimacy of the wage demand — its double decoupling — is also present in this ‘side-by-side’ co-existence. This is a decoupling vis-à-vis valorisation and capital accumulation, for which the wage demand has lost all internal meaning and dynamism; and also a decoupling between the wage on the one hand, and income and consumption on the other, through credit and all different forms of income and benefits. The very composition of the demonstrators and rioters expresses this double decoupling vividly and actively. What wage demands can be raised by the mass of long-term unemployed? It would be wrong to analyse the wage as desperation. In the course of wage demands, unemployment is the contradiction between surplus and necessary labour, it is capital as a contradiction-in-process. It is thus the wage-relation in its totality which is modulated according to unemployment and ‘atypical’ forms of employment, and this includes the wage demand itself, its course, its participants and its activities.

The confinement of the wage demand to the contradiction between surplus and necessary labour is the very composition of the working class in Guadeloupe and in the other French Overseas Departments. Here, this structural contradiction is the very composition of the class. In Guadeloupe, then, within the wage demands themselves, a more important drama was played out on the basis of the wage, the proletariat’s most intimate relation to capital: the production of class-belonging as a limit and exteriority within the proletariat’s struggle as a class.

The content of particular struggles constitutes the dynamic of this cycle within, and in the course of, these struggles themselves: thus, the location of unemployment and precarity at the heart of the wage relation; the definition of the situation of the clandestine worker as the generalised situation of labour-power; the posing of the immediacy of the social individual as the foundation, to be produced, of opposition to capital (as is done by the direct action movement); the suicidal strikes at Cellatex and others in the Spring and Summer of 2000 (Metaleurop — with caveats —, Adelschöffen, la Société Française Industrielle de Contrôle et D'Équipements, Bertrand Faure, Mossley, Bata, Moulinex, Daewoo-Orion, ACT — ex Bull); the posing of class unity as an objectivity constituted within capital, as in the multiplication of collectives and the waves of temporary and intermittent strikes (in France 2003, and the British postal workers). The revolutionary dynamic of this cycle of struggles appears in most of today's struggles as the tendency for the class to produce its existence as class within capital without any possibility of a self-relation, the struggles themselves destroying this possibility. This dynamic then, consists in the proletariat putting itself into question as a class. However this dynamic has its intrinsic limit in the very thing which defines it as a dynamic — acting as a class. That's why we talk of the dynamic (of the rift) within the limit.

The unity of the class can no longer constitute itself on the basis of the wage and demands-based struggle as a prelude to its revolutionary activity. The unity of the proletariat can only be the activity in which it abolishes itself in abolishing everything that divides it. To abolish capital is at the same time to negate oneself as worker and not to self-organise as such, it is a movement of the abolition of enterprises, of factories, of the product, of exchange (whatever its form).

The proletariat can only be revolutionary by recognising itself as a class. It recognises itself as such in every conflict, and it has to do so all the

more in the situation in which its existence as a class is that which it has to confront in the reproduction of capital. We must not be mistaken as to the content of this 'recognition'. For the proletariat to recognise itself as a class will not be its 'return to itself' but rather a total extroversion (a self-externalisation) as it recognises itself as a category of the capitalist mode of production. What we are as a class is immediately nothing other than our relation to capital. For the proletariat, this 'recognition' will in fact consist in a practical cognition, in conflict, not of itself for itself, but of capital.

EXPLOITATION: A GAME THAT ABOLISHES ITS OWN RULE

The illegitimacy of wage demands in a crisis which is specifically a crisis of the wage relation constitutes the contradiction and the dynamic of the present moment. It carries within it, in the very activities of the proletariat as a class, all the ways in which class belonging, as limit of the class struggle, is put into question. The definition of the proletariat and of exploitation as its contradiction with capital thus comes back to the centre.

When the fact of struggling as a class has become the internal limit itself of the class struggle of the proletariat, this means that the question of communisation is posed as a current question, a present one, at the very heart of exploitation and the production of surplus-value. It is not only outside the wage relation that we are nothing, but outside the contradiction of the wage relation. This changes everything, and everything can change as a result of this. The pairs exploitation/alienation, reciprocal implication/domination, classes/individuals, productive labour/'diffuse valorisation' are destined to become the subject of polemics and practical and theoretical schisms. Posing the course of the capitalist mode of production as the real unfolding of the contradiction between proletariat and capital is to suppress the ambiguities between the terms of these antinomies. An underestimation, not to say negligence of the subsumption of labour

under capital in the process of exploitation, justifies on the one hand theoretical immediatism whose form of expression is denunciation,⁸³ and on the other hand, a certain conception of practice as intervention (cf. the question of activism).

Proletariat and capital form the terms of a contradiction, and as such, they cannot be defined as they are in themselves outside of this contradiction.⁸⁴ This contradiction is their unity and their reciprocal reproduction. As a reciprocal re-production, the contradiction produces its own temporality which is the historical process of the capitalist mode of production. Time is internal to the contradiction, it is a *durée*, and not an *a priori* which envelops the contradiction and within which it has to unfold or to play itself out.⁸⁵ As reproduction, the contradiction does

83 Denunciation is the form of theoretical immediatism which is the critique of capitalist society which takes it as it is given. Basing itself on phenomenal categories, theoretical immediatism never reaches the level of the general, because the general does not hide itself in the empirical, in that which is 'clearly given', such that, from the empirical, the general can be arrived at naturally by progression; it is rather that 'the general' is a product of thought by which thought appropriates reality and reproduces it. A more trivial form of denunciation is provided by *Le Monde Diplomatique* which teaches us each month, with great pertinence and lots of documentation to back it up, that capitalism is run by capitalists.

84 So when I say that 'the proletariat and capital are contradictory', this statement, which I cannot do without, is always on the verge of being erroneous.

85 The past is empty, the future too; the present is full. The *durée* is a homogenisation in movement, a fusion, a dynamic interpenetration of the phases of the contradiction. What the contradiction is, is indistinguishable from that which changes. It is not that there is on

not bring its terms face to face on equal terms — it is an asymmetrical relation: capital subsumes labour. It follows the course of capitalist mode of production is the real unfolding of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital; it is submitted to its own history, and not to conditions. What also flows from this is the identity between that which makes the proletariat a class of this mode of production and that which makes it a revolutionary class. This gives us the critique of any idea of the revolutionary nature of the proletariat, as well as of any idea of the immediatism of communism. This is simultaneously the critique of the liberation of labour and of the affirmation of the proletariat as class which has become dominant, and the critique of activism and alternativism.

The class does not exist twice, once as reproducer of capital, fighting within the limits of this reproduction, and again as tension towards communism. Through the falling of the rate of profit, exploitation is a constant process in contradiction with its own reproduction: the movement that is exploitation is a contradiction for the social relations of production of which it is the content and the movement. It is the very mode according to which labour exists socially, that is, valorisation, which is the contradiction between proletariat and capital. As defined by exploitation, the proletariat is in contradiction with the necessary social existence of its labour as capital, that is to say, autonomised value, which can remain as such only by valorising itself: the decrease of the rate of profit is a contradiction between classes. The proletariat is constantly in

the one hand the structure of the contradiction, and on the other, its becoming; there is only the contradiction whose substance is change. The *durée* is an uninterrupted flux, an unceasing creation. Both mechanism, on the one side, which considers the chains of causality, and teleologism (teleology), on the other, presuppose time, and thus they presuppose that time has no effect on the real. By contrast, consubstantial 'time' is a *durée*.

contradiction with its own definition as a class: the necessity of its own reproduction is something it finds facing it, represented by capital, for which it is constantly necessary and always in excess: this is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, the contradiction between surplus labour and necessary labour⁸⁶ (becoming the contradiction of necessary labour), capital as contradiction-in-process (see above). It is the contradiction of

86 'In production resting on capital, the existence of necessary labour time is conditional on the creation of superfluous labour time. [...] It is a law of capital, as we saw, to create surplus labour, disposable time; it can do this only by setting necessary labour in motion — i.e. entering into exchange with the worker. It is its tendency, therefore, to create as much labour as possible; just as it is equally its tendency to reduce necessary labour to a minimum. It is therefore equally a tendency of capital to increase the labouring population, as well as constantly to posit a part of it as surplus population — population which is useless until such time as capital can utilize it. [...] But labour as such is and remains the presupposition, and surplus labour exists only in relation with the necessary, hence only in so far as the latter exists. Capital must therefore constantly posit necessary labour in order to posit surplus labour; it has to multiply it (namely the simultaneous working days) in order to multiply the surplus; but at the same time it must suspend them as necessary, in order to posit them as surplus labour. [...] At the same time, the newly created surplus capital can be realized as such only by being again exchanged for living labour. Hence the tendency of capital simultaneously to increase the labouring population as well as to reduce constantly its necessary part (constantly to posit a part of it as reserve). [...] Capital, as the positing of surplus labour, is equally and in the same moment the positing and the not-positing of necessary labour; it exists only in so far as necessary labour both exists and does not exist.' (Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, London 1993, pp. 398–401.).

productive labour: 'Productive labour is only an abbreviated expression for the whole relation, and the manner in which labour capacity and labour figure in the capitalist production process.' (Marx, 'Results of the Direct Production Process', in MECW, volume 34, p. 483)

Exploitation is this strange game with always the same winner (because it is subsumption); at the same time, and for the same reason, it is a game in contradiction with its own rule and a tension towards the abolition of this rule. It is the object as a totality, the capitalist mode of production, which is in contradiction with itself in the contradiction of its elements, because for each element, its contradiction with the other element is a contradiction with itself, insofar as the other is its other. In this contradiction which is exploitation, it is thus its asymmetrical aspect which gives us its supersession. When we say that exploitation is a contradiction for itself, we define the situation and the revolutionary activity of the proletariat. The class struggle is a game that can bring about the abolition of its own rule, because in the falling tendency of the rate of profit, that is to say, with the contradiction of productive labour, we no longer deal with a process of 'capital on its own' but with class struggle. Communism is the contradictory movement of the capitalist mode of production, the process of its obsolescence. Its overcoming is included as the very content of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital, and thus as the most immediate forms of class struggle.

Unproductive workers sell their labour power and are exploited in the same way by their capitalist, for whom their degree of exploitation will determine the share of surplus value that he will be able to appropriate. But it is from the strict definition of productive labour that one can deduce that the proletariat is not limited to productive workers. Indeed, in the first place, it is in the very essence of surplus value to exist as profit, including for productive capitals themselves; secondly, for this very reason, it is the whole of the capitalist class which exploits the whole of the working class,

in the same way that proletarians belong to the capitalist class even before they sell themselves to this or that boss. However, the global social labour that capital creates by appropriating it (social labour does not pre-exist in the proletarian or in the class as a whole before its appropriation) is not a homogeneous mass without distinctions, mediations or hierarchy. It is not a meaningful totality in which every moment contains all the determinations of the totality. One shouldn't skip a central problem: if every proletarian has a formally identical relation to her particular capital, whether she is a productive worker or not, she does not have the same relation to social capital (this is not a matter of consciousness but of an objective situation). If there was not, at the centre of class struggle, the contradiction which productive labour represents for the capitalist mode of production and for the proletariat, we wouldn't be able to speak of revolution (it would be something exogenous to the mode of production, at best a utopia, at worst nothing).

If the proletariat is not limited to the class of productive workers (those who produce surplus value), it is constituted by the contradiction which is productive labour. Productive labour (i.e. productive of surplus value, that is to say, capital) is the living and objective contradiction of this mode of production. It is not a nature bound to persons: the same worker can accomplish productive tasks as well as some others which are not productive; the productive character of labour can be defined at the level of the collective worker; the same (temporary) worker can pass, from one week to the next, from productive labour to another kind which is unproductive. But the relation of the whole proletariat to capital is constituted by the contradictory situation of productive labour in the capitalist mode of production. The question is one of knowing, always historically and conjuncturally, how this essential (constitutive) contradiction constructs class struggle, at any given moment, knowing that it is in the very nature of the capitalist mode of production that

this contradiction does not appear clearly: surplus value becoming by definition profit and capital being value in process. The lonely hour of the last instance never comes.

Productive workers are not, for all that, permanent revolutionaries by nature. Classes are not collections of individuals; the proletariat and the capitalist class are the social polarisation of the contradiction, constituted by the fall of the rate of profit or productive labour, which structures the whole of society. The particular relation of productive labour to social capital (compared to any other form of exploited labour) does not fix itself as the essence of productive workers. However, in the contradiction of productive labour, which structures the whole of society and polarises it into contradictory classes, productive workers have a singular situation. By blocking the production of value and surplus value, people who live at the core of the conflict of capital as contradiction-in-process do more than just this blocking. In their singular action, which is nothing special, but rather only their engagement in the struggle, the contradiction which structures the whole of society as class struggle comes back on itself, back on its own condition; this is because the relation of exploitation doesn't relate productive workers to a particular capital, but rather it relates them immediately to social capital through their relation to a particular capital. What is constantly masked in a real way in the reproduction of capital returns to the surface not only as a contradiction internal to reproduction (understood here as the unity of production and circulation), but as that which makes the contradiction itself exist: labour as the substance of value which, in capital, is only value as value in process. In the contradiction of productive labour — i.e. the contradiction between surplus labour and necessary labour, in other words the contradiction of necessary labour, i.e. the contradiction of productive labour with itself in its contradiction with capital — capital, as contradiction in process, is a contradiction between

classes; it is class struggle: the contradiction (exploitation) comes back on itself, on its own condition.

The revolution will begin its proper task when workers leave the factories in order to abolish them, attacking the very heart of the production of value; it will come up against self-management, autonomy and all that which could tie itself to 'councilism', all that which could lead us to reorganise production 'responsibly'. Our revolution is that of the epoch in which the contradiction between classes situates itself at the level of their reciprocal implication and at the level of their reproduction. And 'the weakest link' of this contradiction, that is, exploitation, which defines and relates classes to one another, is situated in the moments of social reproduction of labour power, precisely where, far from affirming itself, the definition of the proletariat as the class of productive labour always appears (and more and more in the current shape of reproduction) as contingent and random, not only for each proletarian in particular, but structurally for the class as a whole. But if class struggle remains a movement at the level of reproduction, it will not integrate its own *raison-d'être*, which is production. This is currently the recurring limit of all riots and 'insurrections', which defines them as 'minority' struggles. Revolution will have to penetrate production in order to abolish it as a specific moment of the relation between people and, at the same stroke, to abolish labour through the abolition of wage labour. That is the key role of productive labour and of those who at a specific moment are the direct bearers of its contradiction, because they live this contradiction in their existence which is both necessary and superfluous for capital at the same time. Objectively, they have the capacity to make of this attack a contradiction for capital itself, to turn the contradiction that is exploitation back on itself as well as against themselves. The path of the abolition of exploitation passes through exploitation itself; like capital, the revolution is also an objective process.

Even if we define the ongoing crisis, in its becoming, as a crisis of value, the crisis is still a relation of the proletariat to capital; it is the revolution which is the ‘blockage’ of the capitalist mode of production and not this ‘blockage’ which is a prerequisite for the revolution. The proletariat abolishes classes in the revolution, through measures that are taken in the course of a crisis that becomes a revolutionary crisis and which as such becomes a block to accumulation. There is no situation, no crisis, for which, taken unilaterally, there is no way out for capital. The crisis in the relation of exploitation is given both in the proletariat and in capital, as a search for the intensification of exploitation and as resistance to this intensification. It is this resistance that in its specific unfolding reveals that the emperor is naked, that against the proletariat and, owing to the activity of the latter, it cannot restructure itself, in order to produce a superior mode of valorisation.

It is historically and qualitatively that we need to approach things. Every crisis is a certain configuration of the relation between classes and their respective practices. This is where the previous cycle of struggles is decisive: it is a type of practice, occurring in the course of the crisis, which is able to block capitalist reproduction. Up to that point, any crisis, even the most violent ones, are always moments of the reproduction of capital. There is never a plan, but from the very fact of what capital is, i.e. a process of valorisation / devalorisation, the crisis is in itself the overture to a restructuring. It is a type of practices which appears in the crisis which turns this into revolution, i.e. the ‘final crisis’.⁸⁷ It is at this moment, in

87 It is for these two reasons that, as we have said, the concept of ‘final crisis’ is meaningless. First, there is never a ‘blocking’ of accumulation which results in the proletariat or humanity facing a *tabula rasa*: the crisis is always a relation between valorisation and devalorisation. Secondly, it is a kind of practice of the proletariat, i.e. a particular configuration of the class struggle that destroys the capitalist mode of

the crisis, that the previous conditions of valorisation, and of the cycle of struggles, are determinant: the contradiction between proletariat and capital being defined in terms of reproduction of their relation; the disappearance of a worker's identity confirmed in the reproduction of capital; the identity between the existence of the proletariat as a class and its contradiction with capital. In other words, the activities of the rift within the activity of the class, within struggles.

In the crisis, during the course of these struggles, it is the production of the existence of the class as a constraint externalized in capital which is the quantum leap, the supersession of the situation in which acting as a class is a limit; this, however, is a produced supersession which is far from being unrelated to the preceding course of the cycle of struggles, and which could not even exist without it. It is simply the defence its immediate interests which leads the proletariat to move on to something else: the abolition of the dominant system.

It is in the moment when the contradiction between classes transforms itself from being a moment of their reciprocal implication to being the externalisation of class belonging, that the activity of the proletariat can become, in its objectives, in the course of its measures of struggle against exploitation, a practical attack on the very determinations of exploitation. There is a moment when all the determinations, all the contradictory processes, all the historical meanings are no longer sufficient, if they do not posit the revolutionary rupture as the struggle of the proletariat, in its own dynamic.

And yet, the revolution may fail, be defeated: the extension of communising measures cannot be taken as given. These are measures that are taken against capital, which means that its reproduction, or

production. It may be added, thirdly, that 'theoretical reason' cannot go beyond its cycle of struggles, because beyond is where 'metaphysics' begins, as the critic of 'Pure Reason' might have put it.

the foundations of its reproduction — the sale of labor power and its purchase, even in ‘heterodox’ forms, exchange, basic forms of welfare organised by states, or other institutional recompositions — are still there in this eminently catastrophic situation which is the revolution (i.e. where nothing coalesces any more to make a system). It is true that the dynamic of the capitalist mode of production is in contradiction with the very thing whose dynamic it is (i.e. it is the game that can put in question its own rule), but it also remains, thereby, its dynamic.

The revolution is inscribed in this dynamic as a probable conjuncture in terms of its future occurrence, but a necessary one in terms of the current consideration of the class struggle, whose result is this conjuncture. Communisation itself is a sum of activities against capitalist reproduction; its victory is not inscribed in the latter, rather it also develops its own contradictions. The simplest of these contradictions is that it develops forms of socialisation that freeze it as local reproduction, as self-managed survival, as bastardised forms of exchange. These forms of socialisation and self-management, which may appear, are not a counter-revolution; they might be an articulation of the counter-revolution, but they are not the counter-revolution itself. The latter is always specifically capitalist: these forms of ‘self-management’ that can serve as its articulation will be swept aside, even violently, by the counter-revolution that they helped usher in.

But there is an even more serious internal contradiction in the revolutionary process which is bound up with the very process of the unification of the proletariat in its abolition. By virtue of its essential capitalist determination as the crisis of productive labour (labour which produces surplus-value), a crisis of value is for the proletariat a struggle against capital, in which it absorbs a large part of society against the capitalist class. This is the process of its abolition in the abolition of exchange, in which all sorts of social strata, which are peripheral and impoverished, but not strictly proletarian, are also constrained to participate. In this process

of unification, enormous masses of proletarians who are not workers are swept along by the movement. That is to say that the contradiction which leads to the abolition of value is the contradiction of capital as a contradiction in process (see above), but this contradiction as a living force is the contradiction between surplus labour and necessary labour, i.e. the proletariat in the strict sense of the working class. And it is on this basis that the proletariat is unified in the abolition of value; it is on this basis that it will have to encompass, or sweep along, a fantastic mass of ruined peasants, proletarians of the informal economy, etc., who certainly belong to the global cycle of capital, and who are exploited, but as exchangers. They do not live the contradiction of value as the contradiction between surplus labour and necessary labour, thus they do not immediately live the necessity of its supersession. Misery and extreme destitution do not in themselves constitute the need, or the constraint, to be revolutionary. Here the capitalist mode of production has a terrifying physical and social mass which it can mobilise. Here lies also the possibility of a multitude of small, barbaric wars.

The communist revolution is primarily a situation of entropy; all social configurations (the forms which constituted society) begin to fall into the void, and even earlier situations can recur, contradictions which were thought to be a thing of the past and which were associated with pre-capitalist modes of production. We are currently in a position to anticipate the possible occurrence of practices constituting a revolutionary conjuncture in the crisis, because of the characteristics of the cycle of struggle and the specific historical nature of this crisis. The revolutionary conjuncture is the internal transgression of the laws of reproduction of the mode of production, because the laws which drive the development of the capitalist mode of production only have a finality from the point of view of one actor within these laws. The laws which drive capitalism to its downfall do not produce an ideal, whose coming is to be awaited fatalistically;

this purpose is an immanent organisation of the class struggle which the struggles of the proletariat can decipher practically. This deciphering is a revolutionary conjuncture. There is something of the aleatory, of the encounter, something of the order of the event, in a conjuncture: a finality which produces itself and recognises itself in what is merely accidental to it, in this or that practice.

The action of the proletariat in the current crisis is paving the way for the production of class belonging as an external constraint at its most intimate level — i.e. in the wage relation. For the proletariat, to make demands and to come up against its own existence as a class as the limit of its action are no longer mutually exclusive. In the current wage struggles (wage struggles in the broad sense of struggles over the wage relation, including both demands over the level of wages and the modalities of the deferred wage, as well as demands over work conditions and job security and over redundancies), it is increasingly difficult for demands not to be destabilised as such in the course of the struggle and to produce the organisational forms that correspond to it without their being challenged. The wage demand is now becoming the privileged site on which the production of class belonging as external constraint can be prefigured.

The present moment is defined by the relation and interpenetration between the crisis of the wage relation and the illegitimacy of the wage demand. This explosive connection is the heart of the present moment.

Now, the rifts in the action of the class (between reproducing itself as a class of this mode of production, and putting itself into question) exist in the course of most conflicts.⁸⁸ As theorists we are on the look-out

88 What in this text is designated as the rift cleaves apart every struggle considered in isolation, but the terms of this rift may just as well be considered to be represented in different struggles in the same phase of the class struggle (e.g. the riots of November and the struggle of the Marseilles tramway workers or the sailors of the SNCM at the

for these rifts and we promote them, which is the class putting its own existence as class into question within the class struggle, and in practice, we are actors in them when we are directly involved. We exist in this rupture, in this rift in the proletariat's activity as a class.

OUR WAGER

Activities of the rift are present, directly challenging the theory and therefore modifying it, fashioning it and these activities are not 'ours' in the narrow sense of individual implications.

The question of intervention and that of the return from theory to practice which is intrinsic to it is only posed when diversity of activity has been made into an abstraction: Practice as abstraction. The question of intervention transforms what we do in any given struggle (or what we cannot do), i.e. practices that are always particular, into an abstraction of practice constituting the interventionism/quietism dilemma. The process of abstraction is a very tangible apparatus which is constructed by empirically observable activities and attitudes: 'keeping a watch on practices', the capacity to 'choose' between struggles, 'the part of society above society', the 'everything concerns me', the disappearance of the reproduction of capital in the class struggle, by virtue of which 'anything is possible' — maintaining reproduction as a framework but not as a definition of the actors; the question of strategy and of the revolution as a goal to be achieved; the individual's decision as the methodological starting point rather than the existence of a contradictory process or of a rift which is expressed by activities; the leaping over the reproduction of capital in the name of a situation considered fundamentally common, but beyond the objective diversities (once more, we find here the real development of the contradiction, i.e. the proletariat as class of capital

same time). Everything is a question of scale.

and its contradiction with capital as the course of the capitalist mode of production).

The core of the critique of intervention as a question resides in the abstraction of practice and the objectification of class struggle which infer each other mutually. 'Practice' as such, as an entity, acquires meaning relative to its equally abstract complement, class struggle as situation. Specific practices as such are now merely occasional manifestations of Practice as abstraction. This is the very foundation of the question of intervention, i.e. of intervention as a question and its comprehension of theory as a 'weapon' which reflects back on practice. Theory doesn't need to prove its utility. Theory is included in the self-critical character of struggles; the critical relationship of theory has changed. Theoretical production belongs to a practice which is not 'ours' and to a theory which is likewise not 'ours'.

We are referring to the practice of all those who through their activities create a rift within action as a class and pose it as a limit to be overcome. This is theory in the broad sense, i.e. theory as practical, class struggle reflecting on itself. Theory in a narrow sense is a condensed form of this, i.e. a specific and non-immediate expression, a work of elaboration with its own laws, an expression in thought of this practice. For it, the problem is to give theoretical existence to the communist overcoming in the clearest way possible, and for this we give ourselves the means at our disposal. The existence of this expression in thought is inherent and indispensable to the very existence of practice and theory in a broad sense. It exists and produces itself in multiple ways, continuously or ephemerally. It has no role to the extent that it defines that in relation to which it might be assumed to play a role: it is a moment, to use philosophical terms. Its 'sanction' is internal to it and is not really a sanction, nor does it guarantee it. It is constantly subjected and reworked by that which constitutes it and to which it belongs as a moment: theory in a broad sense, practice. It does

not confer any specific attitude or status individually to those who practice it because Practice, in which it would need to justify or apply itself, is not its object. Application of theory exists when, in considering a struggle, we think we could either be part of it or not. The application, then, is 'how to be part of it?'. At this point, theory has been removed from its environment, its ecosystem, and it will have to be reintroduced: it is the militant attitude which creates the question of the application of theory, of its sanction and of its role. This issue is only inherent to theory if the decision to act and the conditions of its application have been separated. Then, practice is not necessary but rather a decision and the individual is the subject of this decision.

Theory has become an objective determination of the activities of the rift. We are leaving the endless reflexive back-and-forth between 'theory' and 'practice' (the endless logic of the ideology of 'lessons' of struggle, coming from struggles and returning to them) and consequently also the 'question of intervention'. To escape from this vicious circle it is necessary to escape from the dialectic of interaction, which has as its moments: i) reality influences thought ii) thought influences reality. As long as we have not seized reality by means of 'concrete human activity' — that is to say, conversely, consciousness as 'conscious being' — we lock ourselves into the debate about consciousness and reality, we fight to give a non-idealist response to the question par excellence of idealism. Thus a 'role' is sought for theory.

The necessarily theoretical determination of the existence and practice of the proletariat cannot be confused with the simple movement of the contradiction-reproduction of the class in its relation to capital. In relation to this movement, the class is abstracted into a theoretical, intellectual formalisation, which maintains a critical relation to this reproduction. Theoretical production is abstract and critical in relation to the immediacy of these struggles: this is its relative autonomy. No theory can be content

to say ‘look what’s happening’, ‘it speaks for itself’. When theory says ‘it is so’ or ‘this is how’ — in a word, *sic* — it is a specific intellectual construction. In the capitalist mode of production, the reciprocal implication is subsumption (reproduction); that which we produce as the theory of this in its most formal sense is really a formalisation of the real experience of proletarians, but it is far from being the mass immediate consciousness of this experience: it is the abstraction and critique of this experience.

In the period which is opening, to discern and incite the activities of the rift, playing a part when we are involved as individuals defined at a certain point of society, nothing more, and not as individuals universally summoned by the injunction of ‘Practice’, means that it is the critical relation that changes. It is no longer an exteriority, it is a moment of the activities of the rift, it is invested in them, that is to say that it is a critical relation not *vis-à-vis* the class-struggle and immediate experience, but in this immediate experience.

If acting as a class has become the very limit of class-action, and if this is becoming, in the contradiction of the current moment, the most banal course of struggles, then the theorising character of struggles is likewise becoming their self-critical grasp of themselves. Immediate struggles produce an internal distance within themselves, unfalteringly, practically and in their own discourse. This distance is the communising perspective as concrete, objective theoretical articulation of the theorising character of struggles and of theory in its restricted sense, the dissemination of which is becoming a primordial practical activity.

It is the becoming commonplace of this theory that allows it to be, more and more, the critical theory of struggles which are ever more theorising in character. The dissemination of the concept of communisation will be the unification of more and more self-critical struggles and of theoretical production in the formal sense. This dissemination will make polemics possible, and will allow the emergence in struggles of a possible expression

of the perspective of overcoming which will not be, as is often the case now, something implicit to be deciphered.

There's a lot of work to do as regards the affirmation of a revolutionary theory, its dissemination, the constitution of more or less stable nuclei on this basis, and as regards the activities of these nuclei. The becoming-social of the key concept of our theory, communisation, is our affair. This work is the task of partisans of communisation, engaged in class struggles, with the conflicts and rifts that traverse them. In the present moment, theory, as a totality of concrete activities (writing, journals, meetings, dissemination in different forms, etc.) is itself directly becoming an objective determination of these activities of the rift and not a discourse about them.

This is our wager.

The suspended step of communisation: communisation vs. socialisation

2009

BERNARD LYON, FROM SIC 1

“The ultimate point of the reciprocal implication between the classes is that in which the proletariat seizes the means of production. It seizes them, but cannot appropriate them. An appropriation carried out by the proletariat is a contradiction in terms, because it could only be achieved through its own abolition.”

(Self-organisation is the first act of the revolution; it then becomes an obstacle which the revolution has to overcome)

THE SEIZURE OF THE ELEMENTS OF CAPITAL. APPROPRIATION OR COMMUNISATION

What is at stake in communisation is the overcoming of a defensive position, in which proletarians fight to maintain their conditions and therefore their reciprocal implication with capital, through a seizure of capital, not in the sense of a socialisation, i.e. a mode of managing the economy, but rather by constituting a community of individuals that are directly its constituents. It is true that societies, i.e. communities dominated and represented by a class, also always constitute the unity of individuals that belong to them, but individuals are only members of societies as average class individuals; singular individuals have no social existence. Communisation is accomplished through seizing the means of subsistence, of communication, of transport and of production in the restricted sense. The communisation of relations, the constitution

of a human community / communism, is realized for, in and through the struggle against capital. In this struggle, the seizure of the material means of production cannot be separated from the transformation of proletarians into immediately social individuals: it is one and the same activity, and this identity is brought about by the present form of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital. The radical difference from socialisation is that it is not a matter of changing the property status of the material means of production. In communisation there is no appropriation of goods by any entity whatsoever; no state, commune, or council to represent and dominate proletarians in expropriating capital and thus carry out an appropriation. Changing the property regime entails the constitution of a new form of economy, namely socialism, even if it is called an economy of solidarity. When socialism was really possible, communism was postponed to the end of time, and yet socialism could never be what it claimed to be: the transition to communism. This fact made it finally the counterrevolution adequate to the only real revolution of the period. Communisation doesn't constitute an economy. It makes use of everything, but has no other aim than itself. Communisation is not the struggle for communism; it is communism that constitutes itself against capital.

THE EMBROILMENT OF COMMUNISATION AND SOCIALISATION

If the action of communisation is the outlet of class struggle in the revolutionary crisis, the same act of seizure could be, as we have seen, either communisation or socialisation. Any action of this type can take one or the other form; it all depends on the dynamic and on the context, constantly in transformation. In other words: everything depends on the struggle against capital, which either deepens and extends itself or loses pace and perishes very quickly. Everything also depends on the struggle

within the struggle against capital. The constitution of communism is embroiled with the constitution of one last alternative socio-economic capitalist form. Until communisation is completed there will be a permanent tendency for some entity to be constituted which strives to make the seizure of material means into a political and economic socialisation. The persistence of such a brake, able to be utilised by a capitalist counter-revolution, consists in the persistence until the very end of a dimension within the revolutionary movement of the affirmation and liberation of labour, because the revolutionary movement is and remains a movement of the class of labour even in the overcoming of activities as labour. The affirmation remains as long as capital is not yet abolished; this is to say, as long as capital still exists as opposed to the proletariat, even the proletariat on the point of abolishing it, i.e. of abolishing itself. In this context the proletariat retains a positivity, even if this positivity of labour is not reaffirmed by capital anymore; rather it is reactivated in the revolutionary process, as social reproduction becomes a process dependent on the action of proletarians.

PAST REVOLUTIONS SHOW US ONLY TOO WELL: “THE RED FLAG CAN BE WAVED AGAINST THE RED FLAG” UNTIL THE FREIKORPS ARRIVE

Capital “will not hesitate” to proclaim once again that labour is the “only productive activity” in order to stop the movement of its abolition and in order to reassert its control over it as soon as it can. This dimension can only be overcome by the victory of communisation, which is the achieved abolition of the capitalist class and the proletariat. The overcoming of the counter-revolution will not always be irenic, it will not always take place “within the movement” and it will not be a true and quicker version of the “withering of the state” which was foreseen in socialism. Any form, whether it be a state form or a para-state form, will always do anything to

maintain itself even in the name of its ultimate withering! This sclerosis and perpetuation are not “counter-revolutionary tendencies within the revolution”, but rather The counter-revolution. The capitalist counter-revolution in opposition to the revolution.

COMMUNISM DOESN'T FIGHT AGAINST DEMOCRACY, BUT THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION CLAIMS TO BE DEMOCRATIC

It is in the very name of the abolition of classes that radical democracy will do everything to maintain or restore elective structures, which it claims are necessary to prevent the formation of a new ruling stratum, one self-appointed and uncontrolled. The constitution of communism is embroiled with the constitution of a final form of socialism even if the movement that bore it, the labour movement, has definitively disappeared.

The struggle to “bring to reason” the fractions of the proletariat which are most active in the expropriation of capital will be all the more violent when it presents itself as the defence of the democratic revolution, refusing to let the minority compromise the gains of the majority.

THE DEFENCE OF GAINS IS THE POSSIBILITY OF A COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY PHASE

Communisation will never make any gains. All the expropriations that constitute the immediate community will have their character as pure expropriations and wildcat takeovers contested. They will be proclaimed socialisations as soon as the movement decelerates, and a para-state authority is set up in order to defend what at that moment appears as gains and as elements of the formation of a potential new economy. The class recognizes itself as divided and diverse in order to abolish itself. The abolition of the proletariat as the dissolution of other classes implies the internal need of the proletariat for these other classes, to absorb them in dissolving them and, at the same time, the contradiction with them. Communisation

lives constantly in the conditions of its own sclerosis. Everything will happen on a geographical plane, a horizontal plane, and not on a sectoral plane differentiating types of activities. Limits will be everywhere, and the generalized embroilment of revolution and counter-revolution will manifest itself in multiple and chaotic conflicts. The proletariat abolishes itself in the human community that it produces. It is the inner and dynamic contradictions within such a process that give content and force to the counter-revolution, because in each one capital can regenerate itself. Because for the class to abolish itself is to overcome its autonomy, wherein the content and force of the capitalist counter-revolution reside.

**EXTENSION IS THE MOVEMENT OF VICTORY;
DECELERATION THAT OF COUNTER-REVOLUTION.**

Without it being an explicit strategy, capital will struggle to recover social control in two ways. On the one hand, states will fight to re-establish their domination and restore exploitation. On the other hand, capitalist society will continue to maintain itself on the totally ambiguous bases of popular power and self-management. In formal subsumption, workers had long demanded the entire product of labour; this demand will now find a new lease of life and will constitute the ideal content for the reproduction of capitalist relations and a basis for a “solid” resistance against communisation. These factions may fight against each other or align themselves depending on the situation and hence on the development of the movement of communisation. The action of the capitalist class could be as much military as it could consist in social counter-measures and the construction of conflicts based on the capacities of the capitalist mode of production. The revolution itself could push the capitalist mode of production to develop in an unforeseeable manner, from the resurrection of slavery to self-management. But above all the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production will occur in a diffuse way as close as possible to the

revolution, reproducing itself in all the moments where communisation is led by its own nature into a sclerosis of the simple organisation of the survival of proletarians, that is, into socialisation. The capitalist class can equally centralise its counter-revolutionary action in the State as it can decentralize the confrontation by regionalising it, dividing the classes into social categories, even ethnicising them, because a situation of crisis is also an inter-capitalist conflict. If, in an inter-capitalist conflict, one of the capitalist sites manages, through the general devalorisation that the crisis entails, to represent a global solution for all capitals, it will represent such a solution for the vanquished as well.

THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE WON IN A STRAIGHT LINE

Some fractions of the insurgent proletariat will be smashed, others will be “turned back”, rallying to measures for the conservation of survival. Other insurrections will pick up where they leave off. Certain of those turned back or bogged down will resume wildcat expropriations, and the organisation of the struggle by those who struggle and uniquely for the struggle, without representation, without control by anyone in the name of anything, thereby taking up once again the constitution of communism, which is not a goal of the struggle but rather its content. Counter-revolutionary ideologies will be numerous, starting perhaps with that of the survival of the economy: preserving economic mechanisms, not destroying all economic logic, in order to then construct a new economy. The survival of the economy is the survival of exchange, whether this exchange uses money, any kind of voucher or chit, or even simply barter, which can be adorned with the name of mutual aid between workers! The situation where everything is for free and the complete absence of any form of accounting is the axis around which the revolutionary community will construct itself. Only the situation where everything is for free will enable the bringing together of all the social strata which are not directly

proletarian and which will collapse in the hyper crisis. Only the situation where everything is for free will integrate/abolish all the individuals who are not directly proletarian, all those “without reserves” (including those whom revolutionary activity will have reduced to this condition), the unemployed, the ruined peasants of the “third world”, the masses of the informal economy. These masses must be dissolved as middle strata, as peasants, in order to break the personal relations of dependence between “bosses” and “employees” as well as the situation of “small independent producers” within the informal economy, by taking concrete communist measures which force all these strata to join the proletariat, that is, to realise their “proletarianisation”...

Proletarians who communise society will have no need of “frontism”. They will not seek out a common program for the victims of capital. If they engage in frontism they are dead, if they remain alone they are also dead. They must confront all the other classes of society as the sole class not able to triumph by remaining what it is. The measures of communisation are the abolition of the proletariat because, in addition to its unification in its abolition, they dissolve the basis of existence of a multitude of intermediate strata (managerial strata of capitalist production and reproduction) which are thereby absorbed into the process of communisation and millions (if not billions) of individuals that are exploited through the product of their labour and not the sale of their labour-power. At the regional level as much as at the global one, communisation will have an action that one could call “humanitarian”, even if this term is currently unpronounceable, because communisation will take charge of all the misery of the world. Human activity as a flux is the only presupposition of its collective, that is to say individual, pursuit, because, as it is self-presupposing, it has no conception of what a product is and can thus give plentifully. The proletariat, acting as a class, dissolves itself as a class through these acts of seizure, because in them it overcomes its “autonomy”.

**DEMOCRACY AND THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY WILL
BE THE TWO BIG IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTIONS TO
DEFEAT.**

Democracy and the solidarity economy will combine with other systems depending on the time and place. They will combine above all with the ideology of communities that could be very diverse: national, racial, religious. Probably more dangerous: the spontaneous and inevitable constitution of local communities (“we are at home here”). Such communities will be of infinite variations and their ideologies can take on all political hues: conservative, reactionary, democratic, and of course, above all revolutionary – and here the embroilment of revolution and counter-revolution is the rule. For there is no situation that, viewed unilaterally, would be without a way out for capital. It is the action of the proletariat that will prevent capital from producing a superior mode of valorisation for which it can always find the conditions in every crisis and every confrontation with the proletariat, from these three points of view:

Diversification and segmentation of the proletariat

Dissolution and absorption of multiple exploited strata outside of a direct subsumption of their labour to capital

Inter-capitalist conflicts recruiting the proletariat for whom these conflicts have a integrative and reproductive function

All of this provides the counter-revolution with its force and its content, which are in a direct relation with the immediate, empirical necessities of communisation (its dynamic contradictions, or the contradictions of its dynamic).

**THERE IS NO IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE; THE PRACTICAL
STRUGGLE IS THEORETICAL.**

One must not imagine the anti-ideological struggle as distinct from communisation itself. It is through communisation that ideologies are

fought, because they are part of what the movement abolishes. The constitution of communism cannot avoid violent confrontations with the counter-revolution, but these “military” aspects do not lead to the constitution of a front. If such a front is constituted the revolution will be lost, at least where the front is situated, and until its dissolution. The revolution will be both geographic and without any fronts: the starting points of communisation will always be local and will undergo immediate and very rapid expansion, like the start of a fire. Even once extinguished these fires will smoulder under self-management and citizen communities. Communism will arise from an immense fight. The process of communisation will indeed be a period of transition, but not at all a calm period of socialist and/or democratic construction between a chaotic revolutionary period and communism. It will itself be the chaos between capital and communism. It is clear that such a prospect, though well-founded, has nothing exciting about it! It is neither “barbarism”, a meaningless term, nor the royal road of the tomorrows that sing!⁸⁹ This is a perspective that is anchored in the current situation of capital and in struggles – in the current struggle between the proletariat and restructured capital in its crisis. It is a perspective which poses the overcoming of these struggles, not in a straight line, but in a deepening of the crisis of capital currently occurring.

The embroilment of the revolution and counter-revolution implicates all organisation which the movement of class struggle takes on. Any given organisation, any collective, or any other form can be the form taken by organised struggle or else tend towards the representation of this struggle, and develop, in a situation of the crumbling of the state, toward a para-state form. It is not a matter of the opposition between organisation and

89 The tomorrows that sing is a phrase employed by the French communist party and its official poet Louis Aragon to describe their claim on the future.

spontaneity (everything is always spontaneous and organised) but of the opposition between expropriation and appropriation, communisation and socialisation; the latter necessitating that society exists, that is to say that it is something other than “people”, than the “people” of which we shall now speak. In the struggle in 2003 in France we could see proletarians construct between themselves what could be called an inter-subjectivity that was not beholden to the unions, leaving the latter to organise a merely scenic representation of this unity. Nevertheless the struggle did not overcome the general limit of what it was at the time: radical democratism, the political consolidation of the limits of the struggle as a class through proposing solutions to the “problems of capital”, for example the “defence of public services”. This was truly an inter-subjectivity in that (still proletarian) subjects linked together in the face of their object — capital. In Greece in 2008 the riot was fundamentally an inter-subjectivity. In confronting the question of democracy, the inter-subjectivity of the Greek rioters confronted class belonging as an exterior constraint, through the absence of demands, and beyond the foreclosure represented by radical democratism. In the movement of the abolition of capital, the latter (capital) is de-objectified: the subject-object relation is abolished along with the capital-proletariat relation. (We should remember that this abolition is the content of the revolutionary process, communisation, and as long as it is not yet finished there will still be a subject-object relation, even if the subject is in the process of abolishing its object as such; it is in this relation that the abolition is achieved, that is to say that proletarians abolish the capital which makes them proletarian, i.e. pure subjects confronted with the object — capitalist society as a whole). The revolutionary process of de-objectification of capital is thus also a process of the destruction of the separated subjectivity of the proletariat. It is this process which we designate as the self-transformation of proletarians into immediately social individuals. This transformation can never be said to have occurred before it is completed; in this sense it

is proletarians that make the revolution all the way to the end, because all the way to the end they abolish the capital that makes them proletarians.

COMMUNISATION AND SOCIALISATION DO NOT FORM A CONTRADICTION

The contradiction remains that between capital and the proletariat. It does not become an internal contradiction within the proletariat. Even if a total opposition between the two perspectives arises, they are embroiled with one another and both implicated in the contradiction capital–proletariat. The struggle of the proletariat against capital becomes the abolition of classes by the expropriation of capital. But this very action, in its opposition to capital, revives the affirmation of labour when it is interrupted by the capitalist class (it is there that the gains exist as we have seen). This provisional affirmation, which is an affirmation of labour by default, advances a social state whose outcome would be a social State, thus a counter-revolutionary form. In this case, the revolutionary movement must oppose itself to that which it itself has just posed. The process of self-transformation into immediately social individuals can, in the struggle against capital and thus the capitalist class, also be a struggle against proletarians defending the proletarian condition. A struggle of communisation against socialisation.

THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION IS CONSTRUCTED ON THE LIMITS OF THE REVOLUTION

This is what this text has tried to show a little more “concretely”. In the period that saw the revolutionary attempts from 1917 to 1937, the general structure of the capital-proletariat contradiction bore within it the affirmation of the class of labour and thus the construction of socialism. Now the contradiction bears within it the calling into question of class belonging and thus the general structure poses communisation. This

structure doesn't mean that limits don't still exist, even if the direction of the movement is toward their overcoming. The limit is consubstantial with every revolutionary measure, and this limit is only overcome in the following measure. It is the class character of the movement of communisation which is its limit. This movement is the overcoming of its own limited character, since it is the abolition of classes and thus of the proletariat. The proletariat is the individual deprived of objectivity, whose objectivity is opposed to him in capital. He is reduced to pure subjectivity, he is the free subject, bearer of a labour-power only able to become labour in action after being sold, and then put to work by its capitalist owner. The subject free of everything is bound to objectivity in itself, the fixed capital that subsumes its labour-power, submitting it to incorporation into the labour process. The abolition of capital is the abolition of objectivity in itself through the seizure of material means, and the abolition of the proletarian subject through the production of the immediately social individual. It is what we call the simultaneous de-subjectification and de-objectification produced by the seizure of the social totality, an action that destroys this totality as something distinct from individuals. The distinct totality is the independent society, through its division into classes and its representation by the dominant class. The abolition of classes is the abolition of society. The creation of socialist or even "communist" society is always the maintenance of the independence of the community from its members, which are only social by the mediation of society. Communism is the end of all mediation between individuals and their constantly changing groupings of affinity. But in the revolution there is still mediation by capital since revolutionary activity is the abolition of capital! Communisation, in so far as it is mediated by its own object, always carries the possibility that its mediation autonomizes itself in the constitution of the revolution as a different structure than revolutionary action. This tendency towards institutionalisation of the revolution,

and the victory of capital, will continually exist. Communisation is revolution within the revolution, the overcoming of class autonomy, but revolution and counter-revolution are continually face to face. The steps of communisation are those of a tightrope walker.

Communization vs. Spheres

2011 (THE SECOND PART OF 'THE SUSPENDED STEP OF COMMUNISATION')

BERNARD LYON

2011 text by Bernard Lyon, 'Communisation vs Socialisation' (the first part of 'The Suspended Step of Communisation') had two aims. On the one hand, it showed that seizing elements of capital might be 'communisation'—that is, pure 'dis-appropriation', the abolition of all property relations, even collective or 'proletarian' property relations. The seizure of elements of capital aims at the constitution of a new community of individuals—creating amongst themselves, in their singularity, unmediated relations—in the course of their struggle against capital, as the very content of this struggle. But, on the other hand, this process of 'communisation' has an intricate link with another possible content of these seizures—that is, as appropriations, socialisations aiming instead at the constitution of a new economy, which would be self-managed, social, popular, and counter-revolutionary. Each of these two possibilities is, for the other, its own proper other. They find themselves in a conflictual relation, in which each one, in its own practice, recognized the other as necessary, as a moment of itself.

In this process of class struggle, which leads to the abolition of classes, individuals were in fact posed as being beyond gender, since they established a community of immediately social individuals. The overcoming of genders was taken as implicit. This second part of the text tries to explain what these terms actually mean—this 'in fact' and this 'implicit'. This overcoming perceived as naturally included 'in the movement'—as something that goes without saying, due to the content of the movement—should be subjected to critique as such. It is not sufficient to say that communisation, being

communisation, is by definition the overcoming of genders. Although distinct ‘fronts’ within the struggle cannot possibly exist, no element of class society will be overcome without being attacked for itself.

The analysis of gender domination in capitalism shows that this domination is immediately identical to the division of all social activities into two spheres.

“The sexed character of all categories of capital signifies a general distinction in society between men and women. This general distinction acquires as its social content that which is the synthesis of all the sexualities of the categories: the creation of the division between public and private. This distinction is the synthesis because the CMP is a political economy. In other words, the CMP, because it rests on the sale of the labour power and a social production that exists as such only for the market (value), rejects as “non-social” the moments of its own reproduction which escape direct submission to the market or to the immediate process of production: the private. The private is the private of the public, always in a hierarchical relation of definition and submission to the public.”
(Réponse aux camarades américaines)

The revolutionary process of the production of communism will take place within and, most notably, against the generalised crisis of capital. The crisis of the reproduction of the relation of exploitation is, in equal measure, the inability of capital to exploit proletarians profitably and the inability of proletarians to offer sufficiently cheap labour power (sufficiently under its value) in order to valorise capital. In other words, proletarians cannot live on a prayer and, in particular, their women cannot cook it into the reproduction of labour power!

Already in the present moment of the crisis (a crisis still in its beginning), there is an ‘illegitimacy of wage demands’. This means that salary demands—for pay and/or working conditions—are no longer compatible with a capital that normally would have been able to combine an increase in the

rate of exploitation (rate of surplus value) with an increase in real wages (a system described by capital's proponents as the 'sharing of productivity gains'). In the present moment, these demands are no longer possible. In the deepening crisis of the class relation—in the moment when inter-capitalist exchanges are blocked and states are about to wage war against proletarians (and against each other, as well), in order to force the proletarians into trash-zones and thus to make possible the continuation of a savage exploitation—in this moment what is at stake is survival. The struggle against capital thereby becomes a struggle for survival itself. This will be the starting point, on a much larger scale, of what had already begun in Argentina in a limited and transitory way: the seizure of elements of capital.

Struggles against capital, against both its crisis and its anti-proletarian offensive, are already struggles concerning the reproduction of the lives of proletarians. Proletarians will seize those elements of capital necessary for their survival, and these seizures will be revolutionary actions against capital. Argentinian proletarians 'recovered' firms abandoned by their owners and got them up and running according to the well known principle: We produce, we sell, we pay ourselves. This is self-management, but it is only possible in a context where the money thus obtained still functions as money and can be exchanged against means of subsistence. In a situation of extreme crisis that is no longer possible; it is necessary to seize the means of subsistence themselves (something that happened in the case of refrigerated warehouses in Argentina).

Anyway, generalised self-management is devoid of meaning. It would be overcome in the course of the struggle that self-management would necessarily have to wage against capital, as well as by the complete absence of a dynamic of accumulation internal to self-management. The latter can only represent a phase in a process leading either to communising measures (for the continuation of the struggle against capital) or to a latent or open counter-revolutionary regression.

In Argentina, the movements of the unemployed organised various activities: ‘production workshops’ (such as bakeries, collective gardens, brick-makers, and packaging of household products) whose products were destined for self-subsistence or for selling to others. These ‘workshops’, most often under collective self-management, could be considered as embryonic forms of a parallel economy. This parallel economy has—to a very limited extent—begun to constitute a community of fighting proletarians. In and through that community, a transformation of relations has begun, in particular of gender relations, which brings into question the division of social activities in two separate spheres: one private, the other public.

Whether in a revolutionary situation or in every struggle in which they are opposed to capital, proletarian women always bring into question, practically, the existence of the private sphere. When working women strike, it is never just a strike. It is always a women’s strike—because the private sphere, to which they are inextricably linked, is pushed into the heart of the public sphere. In that way, women put into question not only the existence of this private sphere but also that of the public sphere, by means of the intimate and personal character of the relations of struggle within which women exist, relations which put into question the political and social character claimed by public activities in distinction to private.

We could say not only that every women’s struggle is feminist, but also that every women’s struggle contains the opposition of women to their gender belonging – paradoxically, even if they assert themselves as women!

Here are some extracts from an account of women’s struggles in Argentina:

Women were first to blockade the roads when their companions found themselves jobless, but they were made invisible. They fought for food, for health and for dignity, as they were doing everyday in their homes. With struggle, organization, and camaraderie, women began to question the place they occupied: in their homes, in organizations and in the world.

“To go out is a revolution”, said Viviana (age 33, mother of five and a housewife since she was 16) from the Movement of Unemployed Workers (MTD) of Lugano. She describes the process as something that didn’t occur in one day, but rather as a journey with no possibility of return: “Before, I had to wake up at 4am since my husband had a job; when he would leave I had to clean the house before the children woke up, help them get ready, bring them to school, come back, feed them, do housework, and not to miss one single episode of the novella. After, he was jobless.”

In 2001, Viviana attended a parents’ meeting held in the space where children received after-school tutoring. She liked it and began attending regularly. They discussed unemployment and various problems in the neighborhood, and they began to devise a plan of action that would include everyone. Viviana’s husband would leave her every Saturday, uttering the same sentence: “You’re wasting your time.” That was before the creation of the MTD.

The first time Graciela Cortes went out, it was only a couple hundred meters from her house. She was 40 when she agreed to teach sewing to other jobless women. “Yes, I had trouble at home. In spite of the fact that I was still doing housework, still taking care of the children. I was doing everything, yet I had problems. I decided to go out. First politics was not really interesting to me, but when I began to miss the meetings, I realized politics was inside me. My husband would tell me not to go, but I explained to him: alone I won’t get anything, we need to be a multitude.”

Graciela took part in the 18 day blockade at Isidro Casanova with the CCC. She asked herself out loud:

—“What good will it do to me to obey him if we eventually split? I have no regret. I did things I would never have done before. All that thanks to the sewing machine and Women’s Meetings.

—The Meetings?

—They open your mind. I changed in the Meetings.

—Why?

—You see every woman.”

For a while, Gladis Roldan was pleased to say that she was a member of the women’s subcommittee of the lead-committee of the inhabitants of the asentamiento Maria Elena (a piece of occupied land, which became, over time, a stronghold of CCC in La Matanza). Then, in 1989, she attended a National Meeting of Women for the first time. During a debate, a woman asked her: “Why is it a subcommittee? You could just as well be in the lead-committee.” With a glowing look, Gladys said: “You can imagine how we came back [after that]!”. The discussion with the men lasted two months. Finally, the women moved into the lead-committee and the subcommittee of women—may it rest in peace—was disbanded.

These quotes confirm that the existence of private and public spheres was practically challenged, but we must also consider occasions of very harsh opposition from certain male proletarians.

“There are female comrades who declare in the assembly: ‘I couldn’t come to the “piquete” (road blockade) because my husband beat me, because he locked me down.’ For that, the women-question helped us quite a bit... because you’ve seen that it was us, the women, who were the first to go out for food, job positions, and health... And it brought very difficult situations—even death. There were husbands who did not tolerate their wives attending a meeting, a ‘piquete’. It did happen. I’m not saying it doesn’t happen anymore today.”

The defense of the male condition is the defense of male domination. It is the defense of the existence of two separated spheres of activity, as we can perceive in the following example:

— I can tell you the story of a female comrade who was involved in the movement when we were nine neighborhoods, in 1996. She was from here, from La Juanita, and she separated from her husband because she couldn’t take it anymore. He was jobless, she began to attend and he went crazy,

he began to beat her. Then he left. The next morning, he came back, he tied her up, and lit her on fire. She died. He couldn't stand her going out.

— Why?

— Because going out changes your life.

“Going out” changes one's life in the strongest sense. That women who “went out” into the struggle changed both its form and content. In the relentless class struggle against the capitalist crisis, the suppression of the two spheres of activity is the condition for victory. For the abolition of classes is not a basis on which the abolition of genders could be based. One can only be accomplished with the other, and vice-versa. The workers' programme never contemplated the abolition of gender, even under the form of an ultimate perspective beyond the famous period of transition—when only equality could have been possible. That is because the communism described by the programme was only the society of associated producers. But production implies reproduction, the latter taking place on the side as subordinated and dominated. This domination would always have had the allocation of women to childbirth as its content, that by which women exist as such.

The defense of the existence of two spheres is the defense of the existence of economy and politics, of politics as very condition for the economy. The public sphere is by nature male and the participation of women in this sphere doesn't change its nature. *Vis-à-vis* this political-economic sphere, the private sphere of reproduction persists even if “putting women back where they belong” is difficult in a situation where various aspects of class struggle confront each other (popular power, self-management, wild seizures). When it occurs, it is the sign of a serious defeat, at least locally. In Spain, the withdrawal of women from the front lines took place during the militarization of militias, a key element for a complete restoration of the State and the victory of the counter-revolution.

Communization—the production of a community of immediately social individuals in and through a struggle against capitalist society—is the abolition of classes and of the state regardless of its form (communes, councils, unions, or cooperatives). Communization is the abolition of all moments of public activity as separate from the private activity of reproduction, which itself cannot exist without exchange and/or distribution. It thus implies also the abolition of exchange and distribution (even of a “non-exchange-ist” sort, since that is only a temporary form before the return to the market, as every measures similar to “war communism” shows). Communization integrates production and consumption, as well as production and reproduction. For that reason, all book-keeping—all keeping track of accounts—is abolished, since accounting for “products” in itself supposes the separation between production and consumption. Most important of all, the abolition of the separation between production and consumption is, in itself, the abolition of women.

Women are abolished by the abolition of the sphere that specifies them. The private sphere becomes public, and the public sphere becomes private. Programmatism only had as its objective to get women out of the home, to turn them into proles, to socialize domestic work. It had as its objective the equality of men and women in socialism. The fact that this particular objective was never realized cannot be differentiated from the impossibility of programmatism succeeding on its own terms. Nevertheless, we can specify the impossibility of achieving equality between men and women in a public sphere that has totally absorbed the private sphere. For the public sphere remains public, that is to say, economic and political. The reproduction of individuals, who continue to be proletarians, cannot realize itself in a so-called ‘unified’ (that is to say, single) sphere. Against capital, the reproduction of proletarians assumes that women are assigned to childbirth and thus that all the women are

appropriated by all the men— both in general and in particular. In this way, the order that founds the family is reconstituted.

The abolition of the public sphere—as opposed to its reconstitution—is thus precisely what will be at stake in the struggle between the revolution and the counter-revolution. It will be, at the same time, the struggle to abolish the state, rather than reconstitute it—or better, we might say that the struggle to abolish the state will be nothing other than the struggle to privatize the public sphere!

In the public sphere, leaders of all kinds face a mass of anonymous and replaceable citizen-workers, that is to say, average individual members of a class (since singular individuals exist only in the private sphere). The abolition of the state and of exchange is the abolition of the public sphere, but it is at the same time the transformation of anonymous and replaceable proletarians into individuals defining themselves in immediately social relationships. They thereby become strictly irreplaceable individuals, relating to one another only as singular individuals, who can be in no way average.

Of course, the public sphere is not ‘privatized’ any more than the private sphere is socialized, but it is abolished as a sphere involving relationships between average and anonymous members of classes. The singular, social individual abolishes both the social yet anonymous individual of the public sphere and the singular yet asocial individual of the private sphere. Just as the abolition of classes and of spheres are two aspects of the same communisation, so too the de-capitalization of capital and the abolition of all of society, so too the abolition of proletarians and of women are two aspects of the self-transformation of all workers—men and women—and thus of all persons into immediately social individuals, constituted in their entirety (physically, mentally and intellectually).

We have seen how the entry of individual proletarian women into the public sphere of struggle puts into question their definition in the

private sphere, as well as how that entrance pits them against proletarian men. However, struggling proletarian women also come up against the capitalist offensive—which is both the capitalist crisis and a set of ‘painful but courageous’ policies that the state implements to combat the crisis—by taking it out on the bodies of proletarians.

Towards the end of the Argentine movement, women in several of the movements of the unemployed decided to constitute themselves as movements of unemployed women. Bruno Astarian understood these organizations of struggling women—in his interesting pamphlet on the Argentine movement (*Echanges*)—as a weakness, a division with the struggle, which occurred towards the end of the movement. The ascendent phase of struggles often masks oppositions that later appear when those struggles decline—and that is not necessarily a weakness. However, from the point of view that considers the abolition of gender to be constitutive of communisation, it looks otherwise.

The self-organization of women will be an unavoidable moment of the revolutionary process. This statement should be understood in the same manner in which we say, ‘self-organization is the first act of the revolution; it then becomes an obstacle that the revolution must overcome’. The self-organization of women will be the means given to women to combat that which defines them as women. It will thus also enable them to abolish themselves as such. The overcoming of the state and economy realizes itself in the unification of activities: those that are productive as well as those that are reproductive (and those that occur in struggle). This unity will integrate child-rearing just as much as car repair and armed combat, if it’s still necessary. The organizations of women will be, in themselves, precisely this unity. Women, struggling as such, can only struggle for a unity that also unifies themselves—in the face of the cleavages that divide each and every one of them: into proletarian and woman, into citizen and woman, and into man and woman!

However, women's self-organization will also have to struggle within itself against a tendency, which will necessarily exist, to limit its role to representing and negotiating for women's equality (in recognition of women's 'indispensable contributions'). This 'strictly feminist' tendency will exist in connection with everything that promotes a socialization of the economy and the state. It is likely that the most 'radical' women, who proclaim their will to abolish women as such, will be called out as 'traitors to the women's cause', as well as to a real and non-sexist democracy. All those who oppose themselves— and these may be the majority—to democratic procedures and/or elected offices will be attacked for wanting 'to confiscate the revolution for themselves and to constitute themselves as an elite co-opting the revolution at the expense of the masses'.

Struggling women and their organizations will have to unite all women without constituting an anti-sexist front: ruined petit-bourgeois women, peasant women, and all those who are 'without employment'— including housewives, whether poor or more or less middle class. The revolutionary women's movement—fighting to constitute a unity of struggling proletarians, without exchange or politics— will integrate these groups because they are groups of women and because they experience the crisis as women. They will all join the movement against capital and—doing what they always do, but never openly—they will lead and organize real life. This life is now private, but the revolution will make a new life at once intimate and public, totally feminine because it is no longer feminine at all.

The communizing current comes out of the critique and overcoming of Left-Communism and anti-Leninist councilism. True to its origins, this current remained fundamentally anti-feminist in its period of total marginalization. Feminist ideology was interpreted as one of those 'modernisms', which substituted for the proletariat a new revolutionary subject (e.g. women, the youth, or immigrants). Of course, there is

an anti-class feminism, but it does not speak for all feminists. On the contrary, feminism is an evolving phenomenon; it is infinitely diverse. The idea of the self-abolition of the proletariat, which marked a stage in the development of a positive notion of communisation, was based on a working-class positivity which was, paradoxically, at the same time negative. Communization—which has overcome every idea of a revolutionary nature of the proletariat—understands itself as an immanent overcoming of that programme.

Thus even if TC hadn't itself questioned, over the intervening decades, the possibly macho character of the theory of communization, that macho character had to be rejected. For the revolution produces immediately social individuals—that is to say, individuals beyond any determination that society gives them in advance. The individual was considered to be immediately social, but the question of the distinction between genders remained a blind spot in the theory. The question was resolved 'implicitly' without ever having been posed. It took the appearance, within the TC-group, of 'a comrade but a woman', for the abolition of women and men to be taken explicitly as defining the immediately social individual. The target had not been hit. In class struggle, in communisation, in the production of this immediately social individual, there can be no blind spot, no problems solved only 'implicitly'. We had to re-open the question of the contradiction between proletariat and capital, that of the contradiction between men and women, of exploitation, and of capital as a contradiction-in-process. This was not done without waves, but at least without tidal waves. It was not done without raising our voices, but at least without conflicts. The fruit was ripe... without a doubt had been ripe for a long time.

Today, a consensus seems to exist in the communising current, which considers the revolution as an abolition of genders as much as of classes. But a debate exists with regard to the question of whether there is a

contradiction between genders of the same sort that exists between classes. It is important that this debate should not be only formal, but rather should take into account the crucial importance of women's struggles in the present moment, as well as their specificity as a crucial element of the abolition of genders through the abolition of classes—and vice versa. That is the objective of this text.

The communizing current has already had a debate with elements still attached to the autonomy of the class, elements which could even be described as ultra-left. We have also had debates with immediatist or alternativist communists. And now we will have debates—one hopes productively—with radical feminists who want the abolition of women as much as that of classes.

The conjuncture: a concept necessary to the theory of communisation

ROLAND SIMON, FROM SIC 2

There are no miracles in nature or history, but every abrupt turn in history, and this applies to every revolution, presents such a wealth of content, unfolds such unexpected and specific combinations of forms of struggle and alignment of forces of the contestants, that to the lay mind there is much that must appear miraculous. (Lenin, ‘The First Stage of the First Revolution’)⁹⁰

... That the revolution succeeded so quickly and—seemingly, at the first superficial glance—so radically, is only due to the fact that, as a result of an extremely unique historical situation, absolutely dissimilar currents, absolutely heterogeneous class interests, absolutely contrary political and social strivings have merged, and in a strikingly ‘harmonious’ manner. (Ibid.)

According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Other than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and even the reflexes of all

⁹⁰ Lenin, V. I., ‘Letters from Afar, First Letter, “The First Stage of the First Revolution”’, in *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), pp. 297–308 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/lafar/first.htm#v23pp64h-297>.

these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas—also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form. (Engels, Letter to Joseph Bloch)⁹¹

A few citations and a little provocation in their signatures. But the chief provocation is theoretical in nature and defines the object of this text, which is to rework the concept of contradiction.

GENESIS OF A CONCEPT

Everything was simple: capital was the moving contradiction and this contradiction was the essence of everything. It had a simple and homogenous form. It included everything, explained everything, but... like an avalanche, it sweeps up everything in its path.⁹² The rest were appearances [phénomènes] and accidents, contingencies. Besides the economy, all other instances of the capitalist mode of production played minor roles, doing walk-on parts. The segmentation of the proletariat, the multiplicity of contradictions in which these segments were engaged—the contradiction between women and men, or again the other classes pulled into the struggle, all with their own objectives—were nothing but shadows cast on the wall of the cave by the substantial reality of class unity and of the becoming of capital, a reality and a unity always already real, always

91 'Engels to J. Bloch In Königsberg, London, September 21, 1890', in *Historical Materialism* (Marx, Engels, Lenin) (Progress Publishers, 1972), pp. 294–296 http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/letters/90_09_21.htm.

92 'Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth.' Marx, *Grundrisse* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 706.

already unified. To posit this contradiction was, ipso facto, to grasp the process of its abolition and the production of its overcoming.

Until the crisis of the end of the 1960s and the restructuring which ensued from it, capital as the moving contradiction was indeed the content of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital. The production and confirmation, within this moving contradiction, of a working-class identity organised the cycle of struggles as a competition between two hegemonies, two managements, two modes of control of reproduction. It was also the content of the gender contradiction through women's struggle caught in the paradoxical situation of affirming feminine identity and simultaneously demanding independence and equality with men (on the basis of recognition of this identity).⁹³

The present cycle of struggles had a double originality. Firstly, with respect to class struggle, the contradiction between the proletariat and capital was renewed, and this renewal itself—that is, the identity between the constitution and existence of the proletariat as class and its contradiction with capital—conferred upon it as its essential content. In its contradiction with capital, which defines it as a class, the proletariat is in contradiction to its own existence as a class. Secondly, with respect to the contradiction between women and men, their essential content and basic problem became the natural existence of the feminine body, of sex, and of sexuality. Demands for women's rights, independence, and equality, inextricable from the question of the body, produced and encountered their own limits in the fact of being woman. Not only are labour and population as productive force a problem for capital, but, in this phase of the capitalist mode of production characterised by the failure of programmatism,

93 To demand equality and the end of differences in the name of, and through the action of, a group which is defined as a particular one. Joan W. Scott, *Only paradoxes to offer* (Harvard University Press, 1996).

both have lost anything that could have been made into the content of a political demand or of an anti-capitalist self-affirmation. When work and the population become a problem in themselves, 'nature' is brought into question and will not remain natural for long. 'Being woman' becomes perplexing. Gender puts itself before sex.

Programmatism, as a historically specific theory and practice of the struggle of classes, was the overcoming of capital as the moving contradiction through the liberation of work, the affirmation of the proletariat and the emancipation of women as mothers by nature and free workers. The resolution of the contradiction between women and men was evacuated towards an indefinite post-revolutionary future, through the configuration of the contradiction between classes, but equally through the configuration of the contradiction between women and men, since work remained, more than ever, the primary productive force.

Thus, the theory of communist revolution could for a long time be satisfied with the one and only contradiction between the proletariat and capital. Because this contradiction could be resolved by the victory of one term over the other, it was enough just to grasp it and state it in its simple and homogenous form, leaving aside the multiple, diverse, and immediate forms of its existence, by which it distributes itself in the multiple existences of the relation of exploitation (though it only exists in this distribution), and the multiple levels of forms of appearance in diverse instances of the mode of production, as accidental circumstances and mere appearances. The simple enunciation of this contradiction was adequate to account for the dynamic of the capitalist mode of production and the movement of its abolition. We did not need anything else.

The programmatist theorists of the conjuncture situated their reflections in the frame of this reality.

'Such, and only such, is the view that can be taken by a politician who does not fear the truth, who soberly weighs the balance of social forces

in the revolution, who appraises every “current situation” not only from the standpoint of all its present, current peculiarities, but also from the standpoint of the more fundamental motivations ...’, Lenin wrote in the *Letters from Afar*. We now have to write this sentence backwards: ‘not only from the standpoint of the more fundamental motivations, but also and above all taking all its present, current peculiarities into account.’ The question of the conjuncture existed before but it was just the husk and bursting envelope of the essential contradiction, revealing itself. The situation was separated into an invariant, substantial character, and particular historical circumstances, into the essential and the phenomenal, into potentiality and actuality.⁹⁴ But nothing exists otherwise than in actuality and that which exists in actuality is the whole of the concrete or the real.

So there was the course of capital as the moving contradiction. We know Marx’s definition, from the *Grundrisse*... it is insufficient.

As the moving contradiction, capital is the dynamic unity that the contradictions of classes and genders construct. The contradiction between women and men is itself other than the contradiction between the proletariat and capital. No surplus labour without labour, no labour without population as primary productive force.⁹⁵ Wherever there is

94 Within Being, Aristotle distinguished between the ‘potentiality’ that is its essential principle and the ‘actuality’ that is the present manifestation of this principle (between the two, ‘form’ intervenes.) Most contemporary theories of the capitalist mode of production and of class struggle are Aristotelian, that is, idealist. For such theories, the concept, that is, a concrete in thought, is for them a concrete part of the real, the existent, which can be separated into this nuclear conceptual matter (an oxymoron) and the mineral crust of circumstance. As in all idealisms, the process of thought and the concrete are assimilated and even confused.

95 To start from (biological) reproduction and the specific place

exploitation, there is the construction of the categories woman and man and the naturalisation that is inherent to what is constructed; there, also, the appropriation of all women by all men. The simultaneous and interdependent construction of the contradictions of genders and classes introduces the fissures of each category into the other. Inextricable, experience is always impure. But it is not enough to say that no experience and no subject is pure, as a mere observation; this 'impurity' must be felt out and constructed in its intimacy.

Men and women are born of surplus labour. Of the same surplus labour they are born in their distinction and their contradiction. The

of women within this reproduction is to presuppose as a given what is the result of the social process. The point of departure is what makes this specific place a construction and a social differentiation, that is to say, the modes of production until today. Up until and including capital, where this becomes contradictory, the principal source of surplus labour is of course labour, which means the increase of population. The increase of population as a principal productive force is no more of a natural relation than any other relation of production. But to possess a uterus does not mean to 'make children'; to move from one to the other requires a social apparatus of appropriation, of the *mise-en-scène* / of 'making children', an apparatus through which women exist. To possess a uterus is an anatomical characteristic and not already a distinction, but 'to make children' is a social distinction which transforms the anatomical characteristic into a natural distinction. It is typical of this social construction, of this apparatus of constraint, to constantly send back what is socially constructed, i.e. women, to biology. The necessary appropriation of surplus labour, a purely social phenomenon (surplus labour does not originate in a supposed over-productivity of labour) creates genders and the social relevance of their distinction in a way which is sexual and naturalised.

existence of surplus labour is the existence of two contradictions. Each contradiction has its condition in the other, but more still, that which makes it a contradiction, that is, a process that puts into question its own terms in their relation. Four elements, two contradictions, one dynamic: that of capital as the moving contradiction.

This correlated existence of two contradictions is no mere encounter or sum, but exists for each contradiction in its proper terms, in its 'language'.

The conflict between the proletariat and capital becomes a contradiction in the existence of labour as productive force (the contradiction between men and women which, in the terms of the relation, is the transformation of this conflictual relation into a contradiction): labour as the only measure and source of wealth transforms class struggle into a dynamic of the abolition of classes, which is capital as the moving contradiction.

The conflict between men and women becomes a contradiction in the existence of surplus labour and in its relation to necessary labour (the contradiction between classes which, in the terms of the relation, is the transformation of this conflictual relation into a contradiction): surplus labour and its relation to necessary labour transform the conflict between men and women into the dynamic of the abolition of being a woman and of being a man as conditions inherent to individuality. This also is capital as the moving contradiction. In other words, the population as primary productive force (the gender distinction) is abolished as a necessity by the contradiction between surplus labour and necessary labour. The revolution is not 'contingent on the abolition of gender', because it is not by chance if these contradictions arrive together, entangled, in all revolutionary moments, if they confirm one another, or, more often, confront one another.

This redefinition of capital as the moving contradiction indicated the response to a question whose sole fault was to never have been posed. As soon as one considers capital, the moving contradiction, as the construction

of two contradictions that, though correlated, remain distinct, it is possible to designate a revolutionary situation or crisis as a conjuncture. In a kind of misunderstanding, by responding to the question of capital as the moving contradiction, we indicated the presence of another question in our answer: that of the nature of its overcoming and not only the nature of its course.

Thus, the question is to be reformulated adequately:

(1) In part, we know that capital as the moving contradiction is a 'tension towards the abolition of the rule' but this tension alone does not explain the possibility or the necessity of the overcoming, nor what this overcoming is.⁹⁶

96 By way of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, exploitation is a process constantly in contradiction with its own reproduction: the movement of exploitation is a contradiction for the social relations of production of which it is the content and the movement. Valorisation, the contradiction between the proletariat and capital, is the mode in which labour exists socially. Defined by exploitation, the proletariat is in contradiction with the necessary social existence of labour as capital, that is, value autonomised which can only remain by valorising itself: the fall of the rate of profit is the contradiction between classes. The proletariat is constantly in contradiction with its own definition as a class: the necessity of its reproduction confronts it as constantly necessary and always in excess: that is what the tendency of the rate of profit to fall means, the contradiction between surplus labour and necessary labour (which becomes the contradiction of necessary labour itself). Exploitation is this peculiar game, always won by the same player (because it is subsumption), but at the same time, and for the same reason, it is a game in contradiction with its own rules, and a tension towards the abolition of these rules. The object as totality, the capitalist mode of production, is in contradiction with itself in the contradic-

(2) In part, we know that the step that class struggle and the women's struggle must take (with respect to class belonging and the distinction of the genders as an external constraint) is precisely the content of what makes up the overcoming, but this content does not tell us how the 'tension' becomes an effective, efficient reality within this content.

(3) Finally, we know that if we are able to speak of revolution as communisation in the present tense, it is because the present class struggle contains, within itself, the production of class belonging as an external constraint: it contains rifts:⁹⁷ 'Currently, the revolution is predicated on the supersession of a constitutive contradiction of the class struggle: for the proletariat, being a class is the obstacle that its struggle as a class must get beyond / abolish' ('The Present Moment', Sic no. 1). The present cycle of struggles had a double originality. Firstly, with respect to class struggle, the renewal of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital—that is, the identity between the constitution and existence of the proletariat as class and its contradiction with capital—was conferred upon it as its essential content. In its contradiction with capital, which defines it as a class, the proletariat is in contradiction to its own existence as a class. Secondly, with respect to the contradiction between women and men, their essential content and basic problem became the natural existence of

tion of its elements because for these elements each contradiction with the other is a contradiction with itself, insofar as the other is its other. In the contradiction that exploitation is, its asymmetry alone gives the overcoming. When we say that exploitation is a contradiction for itself we define the situation and the revolutionary activity of the proletariat.

97 To act as a class means, today, to lack any horizon beyond capital and the categories of its reproduction, and, for the same reason, to be in contradiction with the reproduction of one's own class, to question this reproduction. We call the situations and practices that experience this duality 'rifts'.

the feminine body, of sex, and of sexuality. Demands for women's rights, independence, and equality, inextricable from the question of the body, produced and encountered their own limits in the fact of being woman. Not only are labour and population as productive force a problem for capital, but, in this phase of the capitalist mode of production characterised by the failure of programmatism, both have lost anything that could have been made into the content of a political demand or of a self-affirmation against capital. When work and the population as primary productive force become a problem in themselves, nature is brought into question and will not remain natural for long. Being woman becomes perplexing. Gender puts itself before sex.

After the first two propositions, the concept of conjuncture follows immediately from this third.

Not only is revolution not the result of an overgrowth of the power of the class, the victory and affirmation of its place in the capitalist mode of production, but, moreover, the content of this qualitative leap is to turn against that which produces it. This turn against is the overthrow of the hierarchy of the instances of the mode of production that is the mechanic of its self-presupposition. The causalities and normal order of these instances (economy, gender relations, justice, politics, ideology...), which concur in its reproduction under normal conditions, is undermined.

The theory of revolution as communisation is not a prediction, but it is the present class belonging as the limit of struggling as a class, and the present contradiction between men and women, which puts their very definition into question. Therefore, it renders a certain theoretical paradigm obsolete: that of the simple and homogenous contradiction which resolves itself in the victory of one of its terms.

Under the shock of the redefinition of capital as the moving contradiction, these three responses produce a new question. How can the contradictory structure of the capitalist mode of production,

this ‘tension towards the abolition of the rule’, transform itself into a revolutionary situation? Obviously the question is not to know when and where such a thing will occur: it is to know the nature of this transformation; not what will produce it—this has already been defined as ‘the tension towards the abolition of its own rule’, that is, capital’s game as the moving contradiction—but the nature of what will be produced.

CONJUNCTURE AND THE UNITY OF THE DYNAMIC OF CAPITAL AS CONTRADICTION IN PROCESS

The nature of what is produced is a conjuncture, a present moment. That is, this situation that characterises periods of crisis, in which the movement of capital as the moving contradiction is no longer a single contradiction (between classes), nor even the simple, homogenous unity of two contradictions (between classes, between genders), but the moment where capital as the moving contradiction no longer imposes itself as the meaning, always already present, of every one of its forms of appearance.⁹⁸

The Contradiction of capital as the moving contradiction, a dynamic unity of the contradictions of classes and of genders is one and essential, but already in its definition, its construction indicates that, in its historical efficacy, it can only exist in its forms of manifestation. None of its forms, political, juridical, diplomatic relations, ideological, etc., none of the forms of relations between the functional instances of capital (industrial, financial, commercial), none of the particular forms of its effect on each part of the proletariat and on the assignation of gender, by which this contradiction refracts itself on every level of the mode of production—refractions that

98 It is important to note that capital as a contradiction in process is the basis of any capacity of capital to be a counter-revolution. Indeed, it is on this ground that the capitalist mode of production, as a contradiction to value in its own perpetuation, is the adequate answer to a revolutionary practice.

are the very condition of its existence—none of these forms are pure phenomena without which The Contradiction could exist just as well. The immediately existent conditions are its conditions of existence. It does not produce its own overcoming, its negation, the ‘negation of the negation’ of excessive renown, as ‘ineluctable as the laws of nature’ (and of dialectics), as if it ought to be simply because the The Contradiction is posed. The dynamic of the contradictions of classes and of genders becomes a revolutionary situation in all of the forms in which it actually exists and in their combination at a given moment, in a conjuncture. Otherwise, it is only a concept.

All of the forms of existence of this moving contradiction should be grasped as its own conditions of existence, in which alone it exists. It is nothing other than the totality of its attributes. Its essence is its own existence.

At stake now is our understanding not only of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital, but also of capital in its historical efficacy as a contradiction in process. Not only do ‘classical’ formalisations of capital as the moving contradiction limit themselves to the theory of class struggle, but they propose to dissolve all the forms of appearance in an essential inner unity. In fact, these formalisations are unable to comprehend these forms as forms of appearance of this inner essence (as if one could speak of capital without competition, of value without market price). ‘The advantage of my dialectic is that I say everything little by little—and when [my critics, author’s note] think I’m at the end, and hasten to refute me, they do nothing more than display their foolishness’ (Marx to Engels, June 27th , 1867).⁹⁹

99 Translator’s footnote: This quotation is taken from Althusser’s citation of this letter in his *Reading Capital*. But, in fact, the actual quote is a bit different, and goes like this: ‘Now if I wished to refute all such objections in advance, I should spoil the whole dialectical method

The fundamental contradictory process is active in all contradictions within the forms of appearance, and it would be absurd and idealist to claim that these contradictions and their fusion in a conjuncture which is a unity of rupture are just its pure phenomenon. All these contradictions merge into a unity. In this fusion—in the revolutionary rupture—they constitute this unity on the basis of what is specific to each of them, on the basis of their own efficacy. In constituting this unity, they reconstitute and accomplish the fundamental unity that animates them, but in this process they also indicate the nature of this contradiction, which is inseparable from society as a whole, inseparable from the formal conditions of its existence. This unity is internally affected by these conditions which are its conditions of existence, that is, more immediately, the existent conditions. That this unity is internally affected always implies that it is a hierarchised structure (and not just a collection across which a single principle would diffuse itself, homogenously and always the same—nature in Egypt, politics in Greece, law in Rome, religion in the Middle Ages, economy in modern and contemporary times, etc.) with a determinant, sometimes also dominant instance,¹⁰⁰ dominant instances which are designated by the latter, in hierarchical permutations, etc. The unity of the contradiction exists only in this hierarchy, in the dominant and/or determinant character of one or another level of the mode of production, in the designation of the other dominant instances.

of exposition. On the contrary, the good thing about this method is that it is constantly setting traps for those fellows which will provoke them into an untimely display of their idiocy.’ ‘Marx To Engels In Manchester, London, 27 June 1867’, in *Collected Works of Marx and Engels* (New York: International Publishers, 1988), p. 389.

100 It all depends on the modalities of extraction of surplus labour in each mode of production: see Marx, *Manuscripts 1861–1863*.

It is impossible to reduce this complexity and multiplicity to the simple and unitary, as if to an origin, or as if from appearance to truth (here we are at the antipode of the Hegelian model of development: there is no original, simple unity). The conjuncture always has a dominant instance by which it finds unity in its very complexity and multiplicity. In the course of class struggle, according to the momentary results which need to be overcome, according to the shifting aspects of power relations, and according to the 'gains' through which communisation ossifies, this dominant instance changes. The contradictions reposition themselves within the totality. Thus, to break up the existing order, what might momentarily be the nodal point must be attacked. But though the dominant instances are in constant permutation (political, economic, ideological, polarisation of the contradictions on some specific struggle or some specific part of the proletariat), the conjuncture is by no means a mere pluralism of determinations, indifferent to one another, stacked together.

This mutual conditioning of the existence of contradictions is not purely circular; it does not efface the totality as a structure with a determinant, crumpling into a facile, additive eclecticism or an undifferentiated inter-construction. This conditioning is, within the very reality of the conditions of existence of each contradiction, the manifestation of this structure with a determinant (that is the main difference between our theory and that of the Hegelian totality) which makes up the unity of the whole. Thus it is theoretically possible to speak of 'conditions' without falling into the empiricism or irrationality of the 'it's so' and of 'chance'. Conditions are the real (concrete, actual) existence of the contradictions that constitute the whole because their role is assigned by the contradiction in its essential sense. In this role, these conditions are not mere appearances beside the contradiction in its essential sense, as if the contradiction could just as well exist without them, because they are the very conditions of its existence.

When we speak of the conditions of existence, we speak of the existent conditions.

If the forms of appearance and essence do not coincide, it is because it belongs to the nature of the structure of the whole to be its effects (the laws of capital must be competition between capitals, value must be price, surplus-value must be profit, the gender distinction must be nature, etc.). The relation between the appearances and the concept is not limited to a difference between diversity and generality or abstraction, but is also one between mystification and comprehension. The concept, says Marx in his 1857 Introduction (*Grundrisse*), is elaborated ‘starting from the immediate point of view and from the representation’, but ‘the concrete totality as a thought totality, as a mental representation of the concrete, is in fact a product of thought, of conception’. Essence does not correspond immediately to its appearance, a disordered opposition of terms between which the relations appear contingent. Nonetheless, essence is in this disorder, and nowhere else.

There is a surface of capitalist society, but it is a surface without depth. The essence is in this surface alone, even though it does not correspond to it, because the effects of the structure of the whole (the mode of production) can only be the existence of the structure if they invert it through their effects. Here we encounter the reality of ideology; it does not occult the structure: it is a necessary development of it.

Essence is neither a real thing (really existing and particularised), nor a simple word. It is a constitutive relation. Surplus value is not an idea or an abstraction under which specific differences can be arranged, and thus the reality, which resides in these specific objects (rent, profit, interest). Nor is it a universal abstracted from the primary reality of the specific forms. Essence is not what exists ideally in each specific form or what allows the external classification of these specific forms—in that case, ideology would be nothing more than a deformed reflection of this essence. The relations

are essential (including the objective and effective illusion); active relations that the specific forms establish between themselves, which define what they have in common: the essence. Essence does not replace the various and finite beings by absorbing them into some kind of exterior unity, or by negating them in favour of their 'inner truth'.

CONJUNCTURE: A MECHANICS OF THE CRISIS OF THE SELF-PRESUPPOSITION OF CAPITAL

Conjuncture, then, is not an encounter between the two contradictions we have presented. There is no encounter; they are always already joint. Conjuncture is, instead, the multiplicity of the forms of appearance of this unity on every level of the mode of production, and, more precisely, the crystallisation of multiple contradictions in a single instance of the mode of production, which the multiple contradictions designate (momentarily) as dominant.¹⁰¹ In this crystallisation, the conjuncture is also a unity of rupture.

Conjuncture is simultaneously encounter and undoing. It is the undoing of the social totality that, until then, united all the instances of a social formation (political, economic, social, cultural, ideological); it is the undoing of the reproduction of the contradictions that form the unity of this totality. Hence the aleatory aspect, the presence of encounters, the quality of an event, in a conjuncture: a disentangling which produces and recognises itself in the accidental aspect of specific practices. To such a moment belongs the power to make of 'what is' more than what it contains,

101 'This much, however, is clear, that the middle ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on politics. On the contrary, it is the mode in which they gained a livelihood that explains why here politics, and there Catholicism, played the chief part [our emphasis].' Capital Vol I (Penguin, 1976), p. 176 (Chapter 1, footnote 35).

of creating outside of the mechanistic sequences of the causality or the teleology of finalism.

A conjuncture is also an encounter between contradictions that each had their own course and their own temporality, between which the only relations were interactions: workers' struggles, student movements, women's movements, political conflicts within the state, conflicts within the capitalist class, the global trajectory of capital, reproduction of this trajectory in a single nation, ideologies in which individuals carry out their struggles. The conjuncture is the moment of the multiple crash of these contradictions, but this multiple crash sets and acquires its form according to a dominant determination designated by the crisis which unfolds in the relations of production, in the modalities of exploitation. The conjuncture is a crisis of the self-reproductive determination of the relations of production that defines itself by an established and fixed hierarchisation of the instances of the mode of production.

A theory of conjuncture is a theory of revolution, which takes seriously the fact that 'the solitary hour of "determination in the final instance"—the economy—never sounds' (Althusser, 'Contradiction and Overdetermination', *For Marx*).¹⁰² All the instances that compose a mode of production do not follow the same rhythm; these instances occupy an area of the global structure of the mode of production, which ensures their status and efficacy through the specific place assigned to one of these instances (neither monadic, nor a significant totality). It happens to be the case that in the capitalist mode of production, the economy is both the determinant and dominant instance, which was not the case in other

102 Translator's footnote: The actual quote from Althusser is slightly different, and reads like this: 'From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes.' Trans. Ben Brewster (Vintage, 2005), p. 113.

modes.¹⁰³ A conjuncture is a crisis in this assignation, and can therefore be a variation of the dominant instance (political, ideological, diplomatic relations) within the global structure of the mode of production, on the basis of the determination by the relations of production.¹⁰⁴

In the crisis of reproduction, this displacement of the dominants and determinants across instances is the how, the mechanism, of the tension towards the abolition of the rule, through which the actual questioning of class belonging and gender assignation take place. Thus, capital as the moving contradiction is no longer the simple and homogenous automatism which always resolves itself into itself. When unity is undone (from the relations of production which are its determination), the assignation of all the instances of the mode of production enters into a crisis. The dominant instance shifts, from then on, according to a kind of game in which nothing is fixed: the bomb is passed from hand to hand. A conjuncture is the effectivity of the game which abolishes its own rule.

The conjuncture is a moment of crisis that upsets the hierarchy of instances—the hierarchy which fixed for each instance its essence and role, and defined the unequivocal meaning of their relations. Now roles are exchanged ‘according to circumstances’. The ‘determinant contradiction in the last instance’ can not be identified with the role of the dominant contradiction. One or another ‘aspect’ (forces of production, economy, practice...) cannot eternally be assimilated to the main role, and another ‘aspect’ (relations of production, politics, ideology, theory) to the secondary role. The determination in the last instance by the economy exercises itself, in real history, in the permutations of the primary role along with economics, politics, ideology (it would be necessary to demonstrate that

103 See the Marx quote in footnote no 9.

104 For example the Paris Commune of 1871 or the seizure of the Tuileries [August 10th, 1792, TN].

this is already contained in the definition of the economy itself within the capitalist mode of production).¹⁰⁵

This rigidity of the hierarchy among the instances of the capitalist mode of production constructs a linear time, a causal connection which progressively creates a link between the events in a purely quantitative temporality: it is the given, what simply is. But the time of the self-presupposition of capital also carries a crisis in itself, a moment of rupture in homogeneous time, the collapse of the hierarchy of instances and of economic determination, discontinuity of the historical process—a crisis which this temporality of the self-presupposition of capital holds in itself, a disruption in the hierarchised instances of the economic determinations, a discontinuity in the historical process: a conjuncture. The conjuncture is an exit from the repetitive—the narrow door, quickly closed, by which another world can arrive. The conjuncture is the conscious practice that it is now that this is played out, as much the heritage of the past as the construction of the future; it is a present, the moment of the at present.

CONJUNCTURE: A NECESSARY CONCEPT

The concept of conjuncture is necessary to a theory of revolution as communisation. In fact, the revolution is not only a rupture, but also a rupture against that which produces it, which can also be expressed in the

105 Criticising capitalist social relations as economy takes their autonomisation as economy at face value. A certain social relation, capital, presents itself as an object, and this object presents itself as the presupposition of the reproduction of the social relation. The critique of the concept of economy, which in this concept includes its conditions of existence, does not manage to pose the overcoming of the economy as an opposition to the economy, because the reality of economy (its *raison d'être*) is exterior to it. The economy is an attribute of the relation of exploitation.

terms of the self-transformation of the subject, or again in the form Marx gives it in the German Ideology: 'the class overthrowing it [the ruling class] can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages.'¹⁰⁶ The conjuncture is inherent to the revolution as communisation: self-transformation of proletarians. All the manifestations of social existence, that is, for each individual, the 'conditions inherent to individuality' (ibid.), leave their hierarchised relation within the mode of production and recombine—moving, as they create new situations—in their relation of determination and dominance. These manifestations thus become the object of contradictions and struggles in their specificity, and not as the effect and manifestation of a fundamental contradiction through which these manifestations would only be eliminated 'in consequence'.¹⁰⁷

When the struggle as a class is the limit of class struggle, the revolution becomes a struggle against that which produced it, the whole architecture of the mode of production, the distribution of its instances and of its levels are pulled into the overthrow of the normality/fatality of its reproduction defined by the determinative hierarchy of the instances of the mode of production. Only if the revolution is and accomplishes this overthrow can it be the moment when proletarians disburden themselves of the muck of ages which sticks to their skin, men and women of that which constitutes their individuality.¹⁰⁸ This is not the consequence, but the

106 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/germanideology/ch01d.htm>.

107 This could be the family, as being of the city or the countryside.

108 'The conditions under which individuals have intercourse with each other, so long as the above-mentioned contradiction is absent, are conditions appertaining to their individuality, in no way external to them; conditions under which these definite individuals, living under definite relationships, can alone produce their material life

concrete movement of the revolution, in which all the instances of the mode of production (ideology, law, politics, nationality, economy, gender, etc.) can become, in turn, the dominant focalisation of the ensemble of the contradictions. If, as we say, the solitary hour of determination in the last instance—the economy—never sounds, this is because it is not in the nature of revolution to strike it. Changing circumstances and changing oneself coincide: this is revolution.¹⁰⁹

We rediscover what makes the concept of conjuncture fundamentally necessary to the theory of revolution: the overthrow of the determinative hierarchy of the instances of the mode of production. A conjuncture designates the mechanism of crisis as a crisis of the self-presupposition of capital, and the revolution as a produced overcoming of the preceding course of the class and gender contradictions, as a rupture against that which produced it.

and what is connected with it, are thus the conditions of their self-activity and are produced by this self-activity. The definite condition under which they produce, thus corresponds, as long as the contradiction has not yet appeared, to the reality of their conditioned nature, their one-sided existence, the one-sidedness of which only becomes evident when the contradiction enters on the scene and thus exists for the later individuals. Then this condition appears as an accidental fetter, and the consciousness that it is a fetter is imputed to the earlier age as well.' The German Ideology, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/germanideology/ch01d.htm#d4>.

109 'The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.' Theses on Feuerbach, Thesis III, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>.

The question of the unity of the proletariat, a question which is inherent to the revolution as communisation, is equally at stake in the concept of conjuncture.

The contradictions which oppose the middle classes, the unemployed and the precarious, the surplus masses of the periphery or the ghettos, the 'core' of the working class, the employed but constantly threatened workers, etc., to capital, to its reproduction, to exploitation, to austerity, to misery, etc., are not identical each to the next, and even less to the contradiction between women and men. The unity qua class of those who have nothing to live on but the sale of their labour power is something that the proletariat finds and confronts as objectified, against them, in capital; for themselves, this definition is only their separation. Equally, the capitalist class is not a unique and homogenous block, nor are the nations or regional groupings that structure the global trajectory of the valorisation of capital. It would be extremely simplifying to pretend that these two groups of contradictions (those internal to 'the haves' and those internal to 'the have-nots') do not interpenetrate each other, that the Brazilian proletarian is a stranger to the conflict between emergent capitalism in her country and the United States and the 'old centres of capital', that men against women could not equally be proletarians against capitalist exploitation.

The unity of the proletariat and its contradiction with capital was inherent to the revolution as affirmation of the proletariat, to its effort to erect itself as dominant class, generalising its condition (before abolishing it...), just as it was inherent to the liberation of women as women. The diffuse, segmented, shattered, corporate character of conflicts is the necessary lot of a contradiction between classes and of a contradiction between genders that situate themselves on the level of the reproduction of capital. A particular conflict, according to its characteristics, the conditions in which it unfolds, the period in which it appears, whatever its position

in the instances of the mode of production may be, can find itself in a position to polarise the whole of this conflictuality that up until then appeared irreducibly diverse and diffuse. This is the conjuncture as unity of rupture. What takes place at this point is that, in order to unite, the workers must break out of the wage relation by which capital ‘groups’ them, and if in order to become a revolutionary class, the proletariat must unite, it cannot do so otherwise than in destroying the conditions of its own existence as a class.

The dictatorship of the social movement of communisation is the process in which humanity as a whole is integrated into the vanishing proletariat. The strict delimitation of the proletariat with respect to the other layers, its struggle against all commodity production is at the same time a process that constrains the layers of the salaried petite bourgeoisie, of the ‘class of social management’ to join the communising class; thus, it is a definition, an exclusion, and, at the same time, a dividing line and an opening, the erasure of borders and the withering away of classes. This is no paradox, but the reality of the movement in which the proletariat defines itself in practice as the movement of the constitution of the human community, and in this movement the fixed and hierarchised relations that defined the reproduction of the mode of production, its self-presupposition, are undone. How can production be used as a weapon, if it is always what defines all the other forms and levels of relations between individuals, and if it itself exists as a particular sector of social life?

All contradictions are reconstructed, they unite in a unity of rupture. Revolutionary practice, communist measures, overthrow the hierarchy of the instances of the mode of production whose reproduction was the immanent meaning of each instance. Beyond this immanence—this self-presupposition that contains and necessitates the established hierarchy of instances—there is something aleatory, something of the event.

CONJUNCTURE AND EVENT

The activity of class struggle is not simply a reflection of the conditions which constitute it.¹¹⁰ It creates discrepancy: ‘... proletarian revolutions [unlike bourgeois revolutions which ‘storm more swiftly from success to success ... soon they have reached their zenith’, A/N], like those of the nineteenth century, constantly criticise themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their opponents only so the latter may draw new strength from the earth and rise before them again more gigantic than ever, recoil constantly from the indefinite colossality of their own goals – until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves call out: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*’ (Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, part I).¹¹¹

This could be the description of a conjuncture as matrix of the event, that is, of a situation that exceeds its causes, that turns against them. The event is the most immediate element, the atom of the conjuncture, it is when the conjuncture produces discontinuity and novelty. It cannot therefore be reduced to a simple moment in a serial, continuous process as the prolongation of its own causes: in revolutionary crises, revolutionaries are busy transforming themselves, themselves and things, creating something totally new, as Marx writes at the beginning of the 18th Brumaire: ‘The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content.’ The event goes against its causes: *hic Rhodus, hic salta.*

110 Further down we will come to the role of subjectivity and of the action of the subject.

111 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>.

At the very beginning of *Wage Labor and Capital* (1849), Marx writes: ‘The June conflict in Paris, the fall of Vienna, the tragi-comedy in Berlin in November 1848, the desperate efforts of Poland, Italy, and Hungary, the starvation of Ireland into submission—these were the chief events in which the European class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the working class was summed up [our emphasis] ... But now, after our readers have seen the class struggle of the year 1848 develop into colossal political proportions, it is time to examine more closely the economic conditions themselves upon which is founded the existence of the capitalist class and its class rule, as well as the slavery of the workers [our emphasis].’¹¹²

However ambiguously, Marx poses here a difference between conjuncture and general abstract analysis—and, simultaneously, he poses the unity of the two. The conjuncture is the process of this ‘summary’ (‘the chief events in which ... the class struggle ... was summed up’), of this concentration in one place, or in one instance—here, politics—in one moment, in events.

The conjuncture is the mechanics, the intimate gears of the qualitative leap that breaks the repetition of the mode of production. The concept of conjuncture has therefore become necessary to the theory of the contradictions of classes and genders as a theory of revolution and communism.

REVOLUTION: CONJUNCTURE AND IDEOLOGY

Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic—in

112 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/wage-labour/ch01.htm>.

short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. (Marx, 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, our emphasis)¹¹³

After exposing the broad articulations of what would become books II and III of *Capital*, Marx concludes a letter to Engels, dated April 30 1868, thus: 'At last we have arrived at the forms of manifestation [underlined in the text] which serve as the starting point in the vulgar conception: rent, coming from the land; profit (interest), from capital; wages, from labour [the well-known 'Trinity formula'—the fetishism specific to capital—presented at the end of Book III, A/N] ... Finally, since those 3 items (wages, rent, profit (interest)) constitute the sources of income of the 3 classes of landowners, capitalists and wage labourers, we have the class struggle, as the conclusion in which the movement and disintegration of the whole shit resolves itself.'¹¹⁴ It is remarkable that Marx, in the architecture of *Capital*, should introduce the classes and the struggle of classes on the basis of forms of manifestation, after having consecrated thousands of pages to showing that these forms were not the essence, the concrete in thought, of the capitalist mode of production. Actually, these forms of manifestation are not simply phenomena which could be shoved aside to find, in the essence, the truth about what exists and about the right practice. We begin to understand Marx's strange turn of phrase: 'ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.'

Ideology is the way men (and women...) experience their relation to the conditions of their existence as something objective that confronts them as subjects. Reality appears as presupposed and as presupposing, that is to

113 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-poleconomy/preface.htm>.

114 http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1868/letters/68_04_30.htm.

say, as world, as object, confronting the activity that, faced with the world, defines the subject. The main fault of all the materialisms criticised by Marx in his first thesis on Feuerbach is not simply a theoretical error; this fault is the expression of everyday life.¹¹⁵ As we have said before, essence is nowhere else than on this surface, but it does not correspond to it, because the effects of the structure of the whole (the mode of production) cannot be the existence of the structure except on the condition that they invert it through their effects. This is the reality of ideology. 'The categories of bourgeois economy are forms of thought that have an objective truth insofar as they reflect real social relations.' (Capital Vol 1)¹¹⁶ In short, ideology is everyday life.

This definition of ideology integrates ideologies which are usually grasped as intellectual problems. Even in this case, ideology is not a lure, a mask, a collection of falsehoods. It is well known that this kind of ideology is dependent on the social being, but this dependency implies its autonomisation; this is the paradoxical power of ideas. The theory of ideology is not a theory of 'class consciousness' but a class theory of consciousness. The division between material and intellectual labour traverses all class societies and all individuals; if ideology always exists in forms of abstraction and the universal, then it is by way of this division which, placing intellectual labour on the side of the dominant class, gives the product of this labour the form of the universal that is the garb of all class domination. The paradoxical power of ideas and their universality,

115 'The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively.' <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>.

116 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#212>.

this inversion of representations and their foundations, is parallel to the real inversion that presides over the organisation of production. The exploitation of the class of producers really turns the production of material life upside-down, within itself, in the production itself of material life. If it is true that 'life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life',¹¹⁷ it is no less true that life is what 'makes believe' that it is consciousness. Bourgeois representations are ideologies, quite functional ones too, and they become perfectly real institutions. Justice, right, freedom, equality are ideologies, but heavily material when one finds oneself before a tribunal, in prison, or in a voting booth. The bourgeoisie, says the Manifesto, fashioned the world in its image, but then the image is the thing: the production of ideology participates in the production and the conditions of material life. Representations are not a more or less well-fitting double for reality but are active instances of this reality which assure its reproduction and permit its transformation.

Ideology circulates everywhere in society. It is not just the appendage of a few specialised 'cutting-edge' activities. The relation of the exploited class to the process of production is also of an ideological nature; since this relation cannot be completely identical to that of the dominant class, it seems at first that these two ideologies would confront one another. And this is true to a certain extent. This 'second' ideology is critical, even subversive, but only insofar as it is the language of demand, of critique and of the affirmation of this class in the mirror afforded by the dominant class. Ideology is always the ideology of the dominant class because the particular interest of this class is the only particular interest that can objectively produce itself as universal.

In this sense ideology is not so much a deformed reflection of reality in consciousness as it is the ensemble of practical solutions, which resolve this

117 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/ger-man-ideology/ch01a.htm>.

separation of reality into object and subject, thus justifying and reinforcing it (see Marx, first thesis on Feuerbach). Ideological representations are effective because they reflect to individuals a realistic image and a credible explanation of what they are and what they are experiencing; they are constitutive of the reality of their struggles.

So, then, what about the revolutionary practice as communisation? It is the production of the new, not as the development or victory of a term which pre-exists the contradiction, nor as the reestablishment of a priority (negation of the negation), but as the determinate abolition of the old and, in this abolition, the abolition of the abolishing subject. If, at this last instant, the relationship of contradictory implication between proletariat and capital remains determinant, in these very particular circumstances (those of the conjuncture), the instances designated in turn as the locus of the dominant contradiction will always be constituted by ideology.

In its movement, in the forms it takes and leaves, the revolutionary struggle criticises itself. This struggle is, until the end, split between, on the one hand, that which remains an objective movement which is not an illusion—the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production—and, on the other hand, within this objectivity, the practice of its abolition that disobjectifies this movement. For that reason, the struggle remains structurally ideological. It lives off the separation between object and subject. Because the dissolution of objectivity constitutes a subject in itself, a subject which considers itself as such, ideology (invention, freedom, project and projection) is inherent to its definition and its action.¹¹⁸

118 However, one must be very careful with the status conferred to this distinction between subject and object, none of which exists by itself or even through their reciprocity. In fact, the struggle of the proletariat and even the revolution are not the sudden emergence of a more or less free, more or less determined, subjectivity, but a moment of the capitalist mode of production's relation to itself—to see objectivism

The revolutionary conjuncture is the internal transgression of the rules of the mode of production's reproduction, because these rules which direct the development of the capitalist mode of production have no finality beyond that which they have for the agent interior to these rules.¹¹⁹ The rules which direct capitalism to its ruin do not produce some ideal that one should await fatalistically. They are a practical organisation of struggles according to the targets and stakes of the moving crystallisation of the dominants, of their relation and autonomy vis-à-vis the determination by the relations of production—this is a revolutionary conjuncture: a finality which produces itself and recognises itself in the accidental of such or such a practice, in the ideological practice of the proletariat as subject, as a term of the contradiction.

Without any previously developed objective basis, communism is a production caught in the contradiction of an objective relation whose overcoming should produce itself as the conscious and voluntary formalisation of a project, because the process of revolution always rejects its present state as being its result. This project is an ideological one because it rejects its objective foundation in its present state as its *raison d'être*, and places the future, what ought to be, as the comprehension of

in this would be to forget that the proletariat is a class of the capitalist mode of production and that the latter is the struggle of classes. The question of the relation between the objective situation and subjectivity is raised in the self-contradiction of the capitalist mode of production. The subject and the object we speak of here are moments of this self-contradiction, which in its unity goes through these two opposed phases (a unity of moments destined for autonomy).

119 It is as practice of the proletariat that the game abolishes its rule: 'When we say that exploitation is a contradiction for itself, we define the situation and the revolutionary activity of the proletariat.' ('The Present Moment', Sic no. 1). See also footnote 5 above.

the present and as practice, in the present moment. In the objectivity of the revolutionary process, communism is a project, the ideological form of combat in which it is carried through to the end.

IN CONCLUSION

When our Greek comrades present the events of the November 19th, 2011 protest in Athens in their text ‘Without You, Not a Single Cog Turns’, this helps us come closer in a situation to what we call a conjuncture.

They present a situation which makes it possible to speak of programmatism, workers’ identity, class unity, asystematicity of the wage demand, communist measures, the cycle of struggles, and they do this all in an ‘evental’ way.

This presentation grasps the movement of the burst of a situation into multiple contradictions, the conjunction in a ‘present moment’ of opposed and heterogeneous interests which are produced, specified and overcome in their confrontations—in a word, it is the very essence of what a conjuncture could be which is condensed in these three pages and grasped as such. Under the effect of the crisis and of the ‘step to be taken’ by class struggle, the contradiction between proletariat and capital as it is grasped in its immediacy is no longer the simple and homogenous contradiction that was our theoretical object; this contradiction has become the ensemble of its own determinations, of all its forms of appearance, including its political, ideological, juridical forms, which are not mere phenomena, but precisely that within which only it exists. All the classes and especially all the dynamics and functions that had been, up until then, kept as absorbed into a simple contradiction between the proletariat and capital are now revealed to themselves and to others. This heterogeneity of ‘agents’ and of projects, these conflicts, all are the conditions of existence of this contradiction. It becomes clear that even the economic definition of the crisis and of the situation is determinant only in the measure in

which it designates itself as political confrontations, as heterogeneity and conflicts in the struggle between proletariat and capital and within the proletariat itself. This economic determination imposes itself as effective in the course of history as politics and as ideology.

On the basis of a particular situation, of an event, these few pages sketch up what a conjuncture can be. Humorously, but without irony, one could say that they are as beautiful as Lenin's in the months preceeding October.

Conspiricism in General and the Pandemic in Particular

JANUARY 2021

“They hide everything from us, we are told nothing

The more we learn, the more we know nothing

We aren’t really informed about anything

Did Adam have a belly-button?

We are hiding everything, we are told nothing [...]

The John Doe case and the Jane Doe case

Whose murderer cannot be found

They hide everything from us, we are told nothing

We are hide-and-seek and hide-the-thimble

Blindfolded and John Doe

They are the kings of information”

– Jacques Dutronc, 1967

“Imagine that we’ve been lied to for centuries and centuries / That certain high-ranking communities know the recipes / The secrets of life, not that which we are allowed to see.”

– Keny Arkana

Some preliminary considerations

In the capitalist mode of production, the population isn’t a fact of “nature.” Its production, reproduction, management and constitutive categories are the products of class and gender relations which structure its form and development. This population only exists socially and reproduces itself as a function of capital. There is no untouched or pure substrate serving as the prefiguration of anything. There is no happiness or suffering, no good health or illness, no way of living or dying that can be understood as other than as expression of these class and gender relations.

It must be added, given the subject, that this constantly renewed expression of class and gender relations – because it is a historical product – exists in the everyday life of thought and action of all classes, even if unbeknownst to its participants (but “of their own free will”), even if it burrows deeper the further one climbs the social hierarchy.

This reproduction is not an ideal and cold mechanics of the relations of production, setting in motion its own ideal materials. The relations of class and gender as relations of production are not immediately given. They exist in a complexity that can be conceptually understood as a dynamic deployment of the categories of exploitation (relation of surplus to necessary labor) on all the facets of existence, which the capitalist mode of production sets in motion, by its total character. Thus of course, the population is produced and exists in the relations of production as such, but by this very fact, in the everyday existence constituted by the (re) production of the relationship of exploitation as a whole – as a condition for the existence of these strict production relations (through ideologies, thoughts, affectivity, sociability, leisure, health, relation to housing, food, symptoms, institutional enrolment, gender identifications on social security cards, etc.).

Making these apparently disparate or heterogeneous elements stick together is not the business of a Macron or even a powerful lobby, nor is it the result of chance or devoid of intentions, ambitions and decisions. Structures that always dominate individuals or groups of individuals and their actions, thoughts, ideologies, etc. are themselves the expression of these class and gender relations which they produce and reproduce, while themselves being reproduced by them.¹²⁰

120 As an anecdote to these considerations on population, during the 2020 All Saints’ Day holiday, two significant events – the second lockdown and murder of Samuel Paty – brought into play two types of fundamental agents of parenthood in this reproduction of

Let us start from a simple, even simplistic idea

No state, no bourgeoisie will fuck up its already hardly bright economy in order to reinforce the “control” and “enslavement” of the population or to favor laboratories and other Big Tech. At most it can be an opportunity, but one to be handled with extreme care by the dominant class in order to avoid adverse effects on work, production in general, the reproduction of labor-power, circulation, consumption and, in a global manner, the everyday social life which feeds the mode of production.

A slightly more elaborate level, relating to the mechanics of conspiracist discourse

Never accuse the institution, power, or the general target of “conspiracy.” Never use the term.

Position yourself as an enlightened vanguard.

Rely on science and reason (proliferation of footnotes, obscure academic references, hyperlinks, graphs, maps, etc.).

Always ask the question: “who benefits from the crime?” Designate for every event a leader, an organization (if possible a cabal) and a single cause. Thus it could be said that since the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 partly derives from the conditions of WWI, the Serbian nationalist who assassinated the Archduke of Austria in Sarajevo was an agent of Lenin.

Accumulate “troubling details” by connecting them.

the categories of the population: 1.) those indignant against the will to enslave and dehumanize their offspring through the wearing of masks at school from the age of 6, threatening to pull their children out of school; 2.) others whose priority was to desperately defend the conformity of their offspring with the republican school through an urgent need to make their children – say from an immigrant background – understand the ban on speaking, reacting and referring to the murder of the teacher at the beginning of the school year, at the risk of expulsion and institutional and financial penalties for the families concerned.

Refuse chance, seeing only necessary correlations (“Do you know that...?”; “It is not a coincidence that...”).

Rely on history and find all kinds of similar events as disparate, but “resembling” each other.

Consider that the enemy (occult organizations, secret services, Goldman Sachs, etc.) never makes mistakes. Everything that happens is deliberate and cannot have been avoided.

Consider the opposite, that the enemy makes beginner’s mistakes (here we return to “troubling details”).

Refuse the contradiction by automatically disqualifying it insofar as it can only come from sources with interests linked to the orchestrating ruler or rulers.

Construct the world as an “expressive totality” (the totality is present in all of its elements and parts). But unfortunately, not everyone is Leibniz and so we must settle for a few unreasonable correlations.

The expressive totality is expressed in a “chaos theory” (the fluttering wings of an Australian butterfly and a hurricane in Jamaica), but without entropy since everything is resolved in the realization of a single, well-conceived goal.

We conclude here: the system is closed, unfalsifiable and teleological.

Let’s get down to the facts

More specifically, in the context of the current pandemic, the anger animated by conspiracism includes several phases:

Anger against certain health measures taken by governments and seen as a destruction of freedom. These measures are: the wearing of masks – especially for children, the closure of “non-essential” businesses with the weak criticism of an essential/non-essential division, travel restrictions, police surveillance through registrations, the established governmental enforcement of Stop Covid and other versions, the sidelining of researchers that question government strategies against the epidemic, the setting up

of a Defense Council and a state of emergency to avoid the Assembly, curfews, the prospect of compulsory vaccinations in the name of freedom while criticizing the refusal to allow medical authorities to systematically deliver hydroxychloroquine and other antibiotic treatments sometimes used, particularly in the United States.

This anger creates connections within a whole range of diverse and varied sources of information, intellectuals and researchers whose common perspective is to give a dissonant but vengeful point of view towards mainstream intellectuals.

The explanation of a deliberate will of the government to enslave people through so-called measures that destroy freedom and to make them servile through fear coalesces all the disparate elements. Fear is generally becoming the most mocked and humiliating emotion for those unafraid of Covid.

The conclusion is that the government and lobbyists form an over-powerful clique that succeeds in leading fear-stricken populations into a boat with a virus that hardly exists, in manipulating the figures, in bringing the economy to a halt with the simple aim of enslaving populations ready to fatten up the pharmaceutical industry.

Yet,

This attachment to and promotion of these individual liberties,
this reflex to assert the legitimacy of a point of view by referring to a world of intellectuals more or less in place but always concealed with titles one as prestigious as the next,

this emphasis on the enslavement of all, the fear which holds them, and from which this enlightened avant-garde manages to escape to valiantly carry forward free and unmasked speech against all dangers,

and finally, this vision of the population as mere *paté* for the consumption of some kind of industrial, media and pharmaceutical lobby.

All these elements violently indicate the extent to which this thought can only come from a category of the population whose existence depends

entirely on its capacity to produce and reproduce a part of capitalist ideology by taking it at face value; that is to say, a version that conforms to and doesn't contradict its own existence, which refers to the place occupied in the relations of production.

The experience of this category according to its social inscription is:

A non-contradictory relationship with the individual liberty enjoyed. Their inscription in the community of capital as a capitalist society is such that their existence as isolated individuals is not contradictory with their dependence on this community. This is because such dependence is not a violent constraint but exists spontaneously, as a stakeholder in total solidarity with its institutions. It is the isolated individual of liberty and choice we have here, not the isolated individual whose freedom to choose takes an immediate turn for the worse in its wandering and unaffiliated precariousness.

A normative vision of society as having to promote the free development of the individual, through the freedom of education, freedom of health, freedom of food and artistic freedom with, at worst, minimal state intervention whose terrain allows them to reproduce themselves as isolated individuals in accordance with capitalist ideology. Indeed it is the capitalist ideal the reproduction of workers is a private responsibility. Yet for both the proletariat and the upper classes, this private responsibility is certainly impossible, although for the latter it allows, at the level of lived experience, the illusion of free will. It is thanks to this assurance and this homogeneity of reproduction without remainder that conspiracist discourse can denounce state intervention as a totalitarian and deceitful system.

This free development of the individual in society faces class belonging as an internalized constraint, the unfree basis of which is the contractual buying and selling of free labor-power. Thus the blackmail of withdrawing one's children from school, or of opposing health policies, exists only for people whose social affiliation is not only guaranteed in practice but also

in full adherence to the ideology of the capitalist social contract and in its function for cementing the reproduction of capitalist social relations. Some can afford to threaten to withdraw their children from school when others know that the republican school puts people out, offering less and less protection due to a lack of means, a lack of control over “school mapping” and/or through the transition from integration policies to those fighting against “radicalization” and “separatism.”

This vision of populations as dumbfounded masses of consumers captive to lobbyists articulates the extent to which those who convey it are at the same time ideologically dominant, productively useless, and thus idiotic to the point of being blind to the fact that it is productive labor that is at the foundation of the world they emptily celebrate through their denunciations.

One has to have a certain relationship to existence to claim that fear is an impediment, as if it were a choice. Everything about the constraints of class belonging must be ignored to see it as merely a question of ideological manipulation. Finally, to think that fear prevents one from thinking, one must be able to live a padded existence where indignation tries to pass itself off as social struggle.

The external *raison d'être* of conspiracist ideology

Society is broken down into a sum of discrete, separate and independent elements: work, education, health, employment, consumption, leisure, intimacy, family, loving relationships, etc., as they are presently. It must then be considered that these elements and functions as they are currently would not organize themselves as they should because of the activity, practices, intentions, manipulation, advertising and malevolent interests of number of certain individuals forming a caste of banks, big owners, the media, pharmaceutical laboratories, and governments, not as a state, but as an organized gang. In a word: the elites. The order emanating spontaneously from these elements is a corrupted version of the necessary order.

Conspiracism operates on a fairly banal conception of the state, the foundation of legal and democratic ideology but which is our everyday reality. On the one hand, there is the power of the state; on the other, the apparatus of the state, or the “state machinery” as Marx called it. The problem lies in the fact that in the state apparatus, which materializes its organs, their division, their organization, and their hierarchy, the state power of only one class is at the same time the organization of the dominant class (as state power held by the momentarily hegemonic fraction of the dominant class on behalf of the whole of this class) and the organization of the whole society under the domination of this class. But if, on the one hand, the state of the capitalist mode of production completely realizes the fusion of these two functions,¹²¹ it, on the other hand, becomes the “natural” necessity of all social reproduction. While it is their very division and their fundamental separation (real and ideological) from the relations of production which necessarily make the organs of a state apparatus a class apparatus (cf. Marx, *The Civil War in France*), all the organs of the state apparatus (army, police, administration, courts, parliament, bureaucracy, education, welfare, information, parties, trade unions, etc.) now appear only as instruments subject to the will of those who control them. Born from this double function of the state apparatus (not two functions but a single double function) – as a dictatorship of a class and the reproduction of the whole society – are both their fusion and the neutrality of the organs. For the conspiracist, responding to the spontaneous thinking, these organs, in their very existence and form, are both neutral of a class dictatorship and not. Consequently, if these organs don’t function “as they should”, as a “public service” or as a “common good”, it is because they are pre-empted, hijacked and perverted by a clique or caste. The conspiracist is the ideal citizen.

121 In this, it differs from the feudal state or “Ancien régime.”

Based on this “naturalized” conception of the state, conspiracy is not the “psychopathology of a few led astray”, but the “necessary symptom of political dispossession” and the “forfeiture of public debate.” It is the response to the “monopolization of legitimate speech” by “representatives” assisted by “experts” – any criticism becomes an aberration immediately disqualified as “conspiracy”. It is true that conspiracism has become the new index of the imbecile. This is because it is the new cliché of journalistic stupidity and of many philosophers and sociologists who still attach themselves to a President of the Republic that maintains the *Gilets Jaunes* to be the result of a Moscow maneuver (Le Point, February 2019). Lordon, who regularly returns to the subject in *Le Monde diplomatique*, sums it up: “But even more than dispossession, conspiracy, who for the elites is the symptom of an irremediable minority, could be the paradoxical sign that the people, in fact, have acquired a majority since they have had enough deferential listening to the authorities and are beginning to imagine the world without them.” (Diplo, June 2015).

Conspiracism would here not be a system of responses with its own social determinations but a simple and negatively justified reaction. Yet this is not enough. The nature of a positive “reaction” must be understood as a system of adequate responses to that which provokes it.

Conspiracism appears then as a contestation of the dominant order, almost like a class struggle. But this is not the case. Just as anti-Semitism was the socialism of fools, conspiracism is the class struggle of experts who are not situated anywhere in particular, not in society, nor along a politico-ideological spectrum.

The “conspiracist response” wants exactly the same world, the same state, but rid of the “caste”: it “imagines the world without it.” It is only a question of preserving all of the elements of this society by extracting them from the practices of these “malicious” and “manipulative” individuals who pervert and corrupt them; real wages, real education, real healthcare,

real democracy, real information, real agriculture, real consumption, real economy, a real state.

Conspiracism criticizes everything, desiring that what exists should become “true”. But by conceiving its object as a “dark side” and demonic hijacking, this criticism turns it into a simple accident of the same world. In doing so, it affirms only that it wants the world to continue as it is. The whole of what exists could be so beautiful were it not manipulated and misappropriated. The dominant class, its reproduction, its practices, the pursuit of its interests, ideological production – all are no longer the natural product of all the social relations that the conspiracist wants to preserve. Instead we find the intrigues of a gang of thugs trying to take us for fools. The conspiracist is clever, an expert in everything. It is remarkable to note (there have been a few studies on the subject) that conspiracism affects first and foremost a middle class holding degrees, one that boasts about its “critical spirit” and wears it everywhere on its sleeve. For those who on a daily basis experience all the humiliation and misery of capitalist social relations, the “conspiracy” to enslave our freedom makes little sense. Having to love this world, we don’t want it to lie to us.

To what generality does conspiracism relate

The above is a brief analysis of conspiracist discourse as a critical system coming from one side of the dominant categories of the population, considering itself neglected, on state management and more broadly on the surrounding world. Once that is accomplished, it must be recognized that many themes and characteristics of conspiracist discourse are mobilized in more or less scattered ways well beyond these dominant categories. The question is therefore also that of knowing what status this unsystematized criticism acquires when it is carried forward by a significant fringe of the proletarian classes. Where does this desire to “rescue” the capitalist state come from, and is it of the same order as described above? But this question, in order to be correctly posed, must also include these themes taken in

isolation as having a different meaning from that which the system of conspiracism gives them, and which ultimately makes the conspiracist the ideal citizen, as the defender of the democratic state and the free laborer.

We will not provide an answer but only a few clues, some of which are already scattered throughout these notes.

There are bricks in conspiracism that are reminiscent of radical democratism: the community of citizens in the state as a concrete and participatory form of their community of isolated individuals. But the situation has changed since the 1990s and early 2000s.

In the capitalism resulting from the restructuring of the 1970s/1980s, the reproduction of labor-power was the object of a double disconnection. On the one hand, there is a disconnection between the valorization of capital and the reproduction of labor-power, and on the other, a disconnection between consumption and wages as income. The rupture of a necessary relation between capital valorization and the reproduction of labor-power breaks apart areas of reproduction that are coherent in their national or even regional delimitation. It is a question of separating, on the one hand, the reproduction and circulation of capital and, on the other, the reproduction and circulation of labor-power.

As the identity of a crisis of over-accumulation and under-consumption, the crisis of 2008 was a crisis of the wage relation which became a crisis of the wage society by setting in motion all the strata and classes of society that live on wages. Everywhere, with the wage society, it was a question of politics and distribution. As the price of labor (fetish form), the wage understandably appeals to the injustice of distribution. The injustice of distribution has an author who has “failed in their mission”: the state. The issue at stake here is the legitimacy of the state vis-à-vis its society. The proletariat participates in all of this, in its own structuring as the class that takes it on board.

In the crisis of the wage society, struggles around distribution point to the state as responsible for injustice. This state is the de-nationalized state, traversed by and as an agent of globalization. In contrast to “de-nationalization”, Keynesian policies were part of a “nationalized integration”: combination of the national economy, national consumption, training and education of a national workforce and a mastery of money and credit. In the “Fordist period”, the state had also become “the key to well-being”, and it was this citizenship that was pushed aside in the restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s. If citizenship is an abstraction, it refers to very concrete content: full employment, nuclear family, order-proximity-security, heterosexuality, work, nation. It is around these themes that class conflicts and the de-legitimation of all official discourse are ideologically reconstructed in the crisis of the wage society. Citizenship then becomes the ideology under which class struggle is conducted. There is a clear link between the success of conspiracy theories and many other expressions, for example the *Gilets Jaunes*. In addition to similarities of form in the discourses, we find a questioning of the incompetence of the state, the criticism of globalization, the de-nationalized state.

At first glance, this de-legitimation and citizen ideology (for the conspiracist is the archetype of the good citizen) is critical, but only to the extent that it is a language of demands in the mirror held up to it by the logic of distribution and the necessity of the state. Practices that operate under this ideology are effective because they provide individuals with a plausible image and a credible explanation of who they are and what they experience; they are constitutive of the reality of their everyday lives. The ideological reconstruction of class conflict becomes the people against the elite who monopolize legitimate speech (which has always been the case), but a speech that no longer makes any sense. The conflict turns into a cultural conflict fought in the name of values: trickery and lies against

authenticity and truth (that which is hidden from us, as ironically Dutronc used to sing and Arkana stupidly still does).

What is played out in conspiracism, in a totally perverse manner as “conflict”, is the relationship of the state – of all its ideological apparatuses, of the ruling class as a whole – to its society. In the crisis of states and all their apparatuses vis-à-vis their society, the social discredit, into which this relationship has fallen, confers a generality to denunciations of a conspiracist type. In a totally perverse manner, the very functioning of conspiracism presupposes a desire to keep this society as it is (insofar as the dominant class only amounts to a parasitic elite maintaining itself through lies and not as the very necessity of this society and all of its relations).

It is not a “conspiracy”, even if the action is concerted and concealed, for major Wall Street firms to go to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission to acquire a change in a law or benefit of any kind. That the general economic representatives of the American (and world) capitalist class address the general representatives of legality of the same class is not a “conspiracy”. It is the state. Or we imagine that the state is or should be “something else.” In place of capitalist social relations (which we want to preserve), there is here only a small number of cynical men who base their domination and exploitation of the “people” on a distorted representation of the world they have imagined so as to enslave minds. Conspiracism needs this simplistic conception of ideology, the mode of production and the state in order to be what it is: the apologia and preservation of current living conditions. Unfortunately, or fortunately, as an everyday practice, ideology becomes something else: the practice of subjects who, as such, are able to imagine themselves as deceived (which goes without saying for a subject); the mode of production becomes something other than the search for “maximum dough”; the state, through its apparatuses, something other than a “clique”.

Conspiracism is a comprehensive approach to society. To answer the question of the generality of some its characteristics, the aforementioned developments provide some indications, clues and elements of understanding that seek only to pose the question “correctly,” without yet managing to formalize an answer.

Let us conclude (for the moment)

The maneuvers, the intrigues, the bent shots of three-cushion billiards – all exist but do not explain anything. They themselves need to be explained as interrelated historical events. Historically, conspiracism doesn’t like *longue durée*. Davos is a decisive area for globalization; but it was globalization that made Davos and not the other way around. If, contrary to what Marx and Engels tell us in the first pages of *The German Ideology*, the “world” is not an “open book,” its comprehension requires the production of concepts, and not because it conceals a corporation, a caste of orchestrating rulers and an Illuminati.

Tarona – R.S.